# DRUMSTICKS

Johanna Staats

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Meredith, Katherine

To dear Daisy —
with love and a sweet
remembrance of my little
visit to Lakewood —

Zora

New York —
2/26/96

Yours
Daisy

To Mr. Dec 3rd
9-07

# DRUMSTICKS

# DRUMSTICKS

KATHERINE
MARY
CHEEVER
MEREDITH
(JOHANNA STAATS)

A LITTLE STORY OF A
SINNER AND A CHILD

*(SECOND EDITION)*

MDCCCXCV
THE TRANSATLANTIC PUBLISHING COMPANY
NEW YORK
63 FIFTH AVENUE
LONDON
26 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN.

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"For the daintiest bird
Is the sport of the storm."

# DRUMSTICKS.

*"For the daintiest bird*
*Is the sport of the storm."*

## PART I.

### CHAPTER I.

### IN WHICH THE SINNER MEETS THE CHILD.

"HAVE they come to the sweets?"

"I believe—they have."

A man's astonished gaze sought the shadows above upon the first stair landing, where the stamped leathers of the wall were imperfectly lighted by a swinging Venetian lamp. It was a small, cautious, yet tranquil voice which had thus addressed him, and he walked slowly to the foot of the stairs, his head upon one side, fondling his smooth chin, hesitating, as he regarded the person of a young female child, whose one white, trailing night gar-

ment was worn with sleepy nonchalance.

A child? And here!

He had known of its existence, yet the incongruity of its presence in this house had never struck him before. He had been aware that somewhere away up in the fourth story there was a place where a child lived, uneventfully enough, hidden away under the eaves like a swallow. The thought had knocked at the door of his sense. He had heard Sophie speak of her, yet not as often as she had spoken of the cook.

He had never seen the cook. But here was the child in person. There was a puzzled interrogation in his air as he approached the small being. Its name! What was it? He could not recall it. Yet he remembered that he had thought that creature of laughter, Sophie, alluding to a canary when he had first heard her use it.

"A bird?" he had asked.

"No, my child," she had replied, somewhat carelessly.

And he had taken it quite seriously for

as long a time as it had taken him to finish the cigar he was then smoking. And afterward he had found that nothing appertaining to Sophie could be for a moment taken seriously.

"Have they *marrons* to-night?"

"I think so."

"Will you fetch me some?"

"With pleasure!"

"And not tell?"

"Not I. I never tell."

"That's because you're a man," was the amazing answer. "Boys never tell. Girls do. Sophie does. Joy says so. *I* don't. But then I never have anything to tell." Here the child laughed cheerfully, adding with emphasis: "Perhaps you wouldn't mind going after the *marrons right away.* If you don't, they may eat 'em all up." She extended both hands with a dramatic gesture and upturned pink palms.

The child seemed tall for her years, which Poole imagined to be seven. She was very slim, with a small head, upon which the dark hair was closely cut. John Poole made a laughing inclination as he

turned upon his heel, disappearing within a supper room at the end of the hall, leaving his new acquaintance to peer between the uprights of the balustrade, rubbing her eyes sleepily and yawning.

The polished floor in the hall beneath her reflected dully the stiff black legs of a couple of chairs, as well as the snow of some roses heaped upon a pile of fur-bordered wraps. It was close upon midnight, and the warm, perfumed atmosphere was frequently cut, as with a knife, by the sharp air from without, when the door opened to admit guests, who were, without exception, men. Lamps, shaded in embroidered laces and gay-colored silks, dimly lighted a small unoccupied reception room at the right of the entrance. But the chief radiance fell from the open door of a supper room at the end of the hall. Laughter, scrappy sentences, exclamations, greetings, and farewells could be heard from within, where some half-dozen people sat informally about a table. A woman's voice, shrill, mocking, yet sin-

gularly sweet, singled itself out from the rest.

The child waited, listening, her dark eyes gloomily apprehensive of a failure in the raid she had instituted upon the *marrons glacée.*

Her wide-parted lips revealed bits of tiny darkened first teeth, of which one was already loosened, being displaced by a firm, white, new one. This she nervously fingered, in a childish way, with a little thin forefinger. The child had a small, fine, perfectly straight nose, which promised character to the face in future, and already gave a certain charm to its immaturity. The eyes were large, soft, and expressive. Leaning, she grasped the balustrade in both hands, looking down into the hall with grave anxiety, and shivering as she felt the night air which entered with the last visitor, a new-comer, a tall, anæmic young fellow, who nodded to Poole as he returned with the desired *marrons.*

"Alex!"

"Poole! What's your hurry?"

A glance explained the situation.

"The youngster, hey? Say, Poole, wasn't it glorious?"

"Very good."

"*Very good!* Nonsense! It was a hit. There'll be a long run! I suppose Sophie is receiving congratulations. In a hurry? Ah, I see. Paying court to the child, eh? I suppose it *is* hers. Isn't it?"

"If you'll allow me, I'll go and ask it."

"Certainly. Well—yours later." And the speaker vanished within the supper room.

That night the new light opera, "The Golden Bubble," had put a cap and bells upon the head of the foolish old town. And the mesmeric beauty and sweet voice of Sophie Stang had contributed to the success of the first night performance. The critics were at that moment scribbling the fact in order to feed the machines of morning dailies. They were not saying much about "E in alt," nor were they alluding to supernal adagios and cosmic tones to grace an angelic choir. They

were announcing, simply enough, that little Sophie Stang, a London music hall singer within the five years, had made a success of a small *rôle* in a new operatic skit, the score of which was good, very good, and the book of which was bad, very bad—if one asks for the truth always. And the town hugged its sides as it whistled the airs of "The Golden Bubble," and the dozen or so friends of Miss Stang were making of her small, narrow-fronted house a sort of temple, the air of which swooned with the breath of the purple and white floral tokens which were heaped mightily within it.

And upon the first stair landing of that house, which had been rented for the season, the small daughter of Sophie Stang awaited anxiously some much desired, if undesirable, *marrons glacée*—an innocent child—herself more desirable than desired.

With kindly deference Poole gallantly presented the sweets the little one, running lightly up the stairs to do so. He found himself quietly interested. An

hour before he had been very much bored, but he now promised himself some amusement. He settled himself upon the upper stair close beside his small companion, who, already seated, was balancing the plate with difficulty upon her knees as she began to eat her coveted *marrons*. Suddenly she looked up.

"You didn't tell Sophie?"

"Certainly not!" asserted Poole, warmly. "Didn't I promise I would not?"

"I'm glad you didn't. She would have scolded Joy."

"May I ask—who is Joy?"

"Joy's a nice old person. She sleeps in my room and cares for me. She came over with us when we came. I've known her longest of any one except Sophie."

"Sophie! Is not Sophie your mamma?"

"Of course she is!" with a puzzled glance at him.

"Then why do you call her Sophie? Why not call her 'Mamma,' as other little girls call their mothers?"

"I'm afraid—I'm afraid I'm not like other little girls!" said the child, looking

at him closely and toying with a chestnut. The smile left her lips, and the puzzled look in her eyes became intensified.

The man sat staring at her, silent, his hands planted upon his knees. Here was a situation. This child was not at all what one would have expected of the child of Sophie. Or was it, perhaps, that Sophie was not what one would have expected of the mother of such a child ?

"Aren't you a bit lonely, sometimes ?" he asked of her, suddenly.

"I don't understand !" said she, with raised brows. She sighed. Then, attracted by the *marrons* again, she began to munch them, rolling her eyes like a blissful kitten.

"I come down here at night ; that's fun, you know," she added, presently. "Riggs brings me things. But I knew he was too busy to-night. I could hear the corks pop. I wake up when I hear Sophie come home in her carriage. There's such a noise always ! Before that everything is so *awful* quiet. They all laugh down

here. Joy never laughs. So I come down and listen."

"And no one knows but Riggs?" Poole knew who Riggs was.

"No. You see, I creep, creep, like a mouse. I play I'm a mouse. Then, when I get here, and see Riggs in the hall, I scratch with my fingers—so." She gently rasped the balusters with her tiny nails. "And then he brings me sweets. And he never tells Sophie. Then I sit here, like a mouse, and nibble, and listen, until I get cold and tired; then I go back to bed, and there is old Joy asleep. She never knows. Are you afraid of a mouse?"

"No. But I don't like them. I like you. How could I help that?"

His gray eyes were rather small and pale, but there was a pleasant light in them which the child fancied. They had heavy lids and there were lines about them, but on the whole she decided that they were not ugly eyes. His rather wide mouth had a slow smile.

"I'm glad," replied the child, hushing

her voice to a confidential whisper. "I like you, too."

"That is very nice. Why should you ?"

"Because you're good."

"Am I ?" And the man seemed first amused and then saddened. And his tones grew quite tender as he said : "But you ought to be asleep, small woman !"

"I was. But I dreamed. I always dream. I hate to dream."

"Why ?"

"Because I dream so many things that aren't so. And then it is worse when I wake up." The little face was very sober.

"What things ?" He caressed her short locks.

"Oh, that I'm like other little girls—that I've a papa. Will you *never* laugh if I ask you a question ?"

"Never !" promised Poole, earnestly.

"Well, have *all* these other little girls papas ?"

Poole whistled a strain of "The Golden Bubble," softly, and drew a long breath before he answered her question with another.

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because I heard so. And I wonder about it."

The cheek nearest Poole became suddenly plump with the fulness of a *marron*. With enforced deliberation she proceeded:

"One day in the park—you know I go every day to the park—one day in the park I liked a little girl, and she liked me. But her nurse knew Joy, and she put her head up, so, and pulled the little girl away by her arm. She said, 'You mustn't play with her—she hasn't any papa!' And she laughed, and Joy was just as *mad*. I never saw her so mad. The little girl's name was Fanny. Her maid called her so. Do you like that name?"

"It is a good name enough. But what is yours?

"I don't believe I ever had any *real* name. But they call me—most always—Drumsticks."

It was the name which Poole had heard the child's mother use once or twice, and which for some unaccountable reason he

had been unable to recall. The situation was becoming more interesting. There was so much of incongruity between this friendly little child with the innocent eyes, her forlorn young life hidden away a secret of the fourth floor; and the mother of the child, whose mocking voice he could hear as he sat indulging himself in his queer tête-à-tête. With the mother he felt himself something of a saint. With the child he was conscious that he was but a man—and a bad one. He smiled as he tried to explain this to himself, and the child seeing his cheerfulness thought it was mirth inspired by her odd name, of which she was always much ashamed.

"What a name!" he said, absently, at length. "Why do they call such a small and very sweet child by such a long and very ugly name?"

"That was what Riggs asked Joy—when we first came." And the child's eyes sparkled with pleasure at the enchantment of his careless flattery.

"What did Joy say?"

"She said"—and the child enunciated

each word carefully and solemnly, as if long committed to memory and often studied in search of a meaning—"she said, that she guessed it was while any one would like a wing or a bit of the white meat, that nobody wanted—drumsticks—the legs of the chicken, you know."

There was more than a suggestion of tearful pride in the voice now, and Poole looked gravely away from her as she continued, half shutting his eyes and stretching out his arm as if to enfold her within its circle. He restrained himself, however, amused to find that he was afraid of offending by offering sympathy which had not as yet been asked. Drumsticks was not a young person with whom one might take liberties carelessly.

"You see, I was named on Christmas night. Joy says I was brought to the table for the first time then, and when they named me—oh, I don't remember all of it. It's too long. But I remember what Joy told Riggs. I went off by myself and got Miss Gray Blanket (Poole afterwards made the acquaintance of this

friend of the loneliest child he ever knew), and we thought about it for a long while."

Poole watched her from the corners of his eyes. She had forgotten the remaining *marrons*, and was speaking with the composure of a sad woman of the world.

"I guess it's *true*. Nobody wants me. Sophie doesn't, and Joy doesn't—often. They all say 'Run away, Drumsticks!' They've said that *most* often of anything they've ever said to me—'*Run away, Drumsticks!*'" She looked at him very anxiously.

"Do you think you could like a little girl with such a name?"

"I know I could. On second thought, I like the name very much. It's so odd, don't you know! And there's only one Drumsticks. And I'm sure she's an awfully jolly sort."

The child clasped her hands and held them out to her new friend, while she flashed upon him a very radiant face. As the sceptre was extended he made bold to touch her little dark head with his kiss.

In a second her arms were about his neck, her lips at his ear:

"Kiss me—would you mind?—just once more; no one ever, *ever* kisses me."

And this time the kiss became quite a solemn affair—almost a sacrament—a seal to a compact—one never to be forgotten by Poole. There are memories of kisses and kisses to a man dreaming over his pipe along in his forties. And none are recalled more tenderly than those exchanged with a pure little maiden of very few summers. And the worse a man is morally, the more prone he is to dwell upon such recollections.

John Adzit Poole was twenty-seven years old at the time of the happenings related in this story. But he lived to be old enough to care for memories. And among others he often saw himself sitting in the dusky shadows of the staircase with a very small grave maiden by his side. Almost he could recall the sound of that airy mockery in the tones of the mother as he heard it from the supper room below, amid a chorus of male voices.

And when he did so the pain of it and the shame of it grew great, and he needed the other memory of a child's holy kiss to give him back again his manhood's self-respect.

"Who are your companions? Who does Drumsticks play with?" he asked, stroking her head gently, and by this time absolutely lost in amazement at the position in which he found himself. Poole had never liked children.

"Oh! I play with Miss Gray Blanket, and I play with Fanny."

"Fanny? The little girl?"

"Yes. After it's dark, you know, I play with her. Then I talk to her. She never answers. But I play she's so tired she can't. Of course, I can't play *that* when it is light. For then I could *see* that she was not there. But in the dark she *might* be."

"Exactly," responded Poole, abstractedly. He was thinking that many men and women indulge in the same game. Sometimes with their faith in each other; more often, though, with their creeds.

"So I say *every* night: 'Good-night, Fanny!' and then I say softly to my blanket: 'She's asleep! Don't wake her up!' And we both lie very still, until the first thing I know—why, I don't know anything!" Drumsticks laughed merrily, and, snuggling close to Poole, seemed to anticipate somewhat passing that night upon the stairs.

He was thinking that she ought to be in bed, and wondering how best to suggest the subject without any appearance of haste.

"Do you think Sophie is pretty?" The question seemed to explode in his ear. He had thought Sophie extremely beautiful—and been sorry for it. His eyes suddenly became mere expressionless slits, outlined by his short black lashes.

"Very," said he briefly. "But you must go to bed now."

"I will." She arose obediently, placing the plate and remaining *marrons* upon the upper stair.

"Shall I see you again?" she asked wistfully.

"I think so—of course."

"People change so! You see the same people a few days—or only once—I mean I see them over the balustrades when I'm in the hall here looking down. And then you never, never see them any more. Always *new* people—and new places. I've seen you heaps of times when I've been here watching. Would you mind—would you be *mad*—if I told you what I've always, *always* called you?'

They were both standing now, Poole shaking out his trouser-legs and stretching his arms. He was tired and glad to end it. He looked down upon her slim person, her face grown rosy during the half-hour, reminding him of a small round apple stuck upon a willow switch. Her head, although so small, impressed one as being too heavy for her slender swaying body.

"May I whisper? You won't be *mad?*"

He stooped laughingly.

"I call you, I have always called you—quite to myself, you know—no one knew

—and it has been such a comfort!" Her lips were against his ear.

"You came so often, you know—"

"Yes, yes! What was it—my name, which you gave me?"

"I called you my Play-papa!"

Poole started away from her, flushing an angry red. The servants! Had the child been taught? A glance at her face dispelled the idea. Yet dropping the former tenderness of tone, he kissed her coldly, pulled her pretty white ear, and told her indifferently to run away up to bed. Turning, he leisurely descended the stairs, looking at his watch as he did so.

Drumsticks had flown away into the darkness, yet just as Poole replaced his watch in his vest pocket he heard a stifled but unmistakable sound. Drumsticks was evidently weeping, guilty of an offence which she would never comprehend.

"The little devil!" murmured Poole to himself. Then he whipped about, and, running up three steps at a time, came upon her half-way up the second flight.

There was no light in the third and fourth stories of the house.

Lifting her in his arms, her wet cheek against his, he carried her slowly the rest of her journey.

"Drumsticks, see here!" he whispered, out of breath and panting, although her weight was slight. "Call me Play-papa if you like. But *prove* that girls can keep secrets as well as boys! And don't tell any one—not even Fanny!"

The relief from her misery was so sudden that Drumsticks administered an impassioned hug which exhibited unexpected strength. As she slipped from his arms just outside a door upon the fourth floor of the house, and from which the light of a night lamp shone, her loose night robe drew tightly across her childish knees, which, having recently lost their infantile roundness, were assuming the characteristic angularity of her seven years.

"Aren't feet ugly?" she asked of him, smilingly, through damp lashes, and regarding her own with critical attention.

"But good-night—"

And while well upon his way down the third flight a fervent, floating whisper reached him—a mere shadow of a voice:

"Good-night, good-night, Play-papa!"

# PART I.

## CHAPTER II.

### BEING AN INTERPOLATION.

> "*If I could dwell*
> *Where Israfel*
> *Hath dwelt, and he where I,*
> *He might not sing so wildly well*
> *A mortal melody.*"

To make a story, two men and a woman are necessary, or one man and two women. The first is a comedy, the second a tragedy. And when a child or so is included in the *dramatis personæ* the whole thing becomes still more complicated.

John Adzit l'oole at twenty-seven was a young man of fair family, a moderate income, the best of reputations, and good intentions.

In the spring of the year in which the happenings of this small tale occurred—in fact, up to the third day of the June of that year—he had the one woman in his

life which the law allows a man, she being, as you will at once take it, his wife. Up to that time, then, we had not the material for a story. But Poole was happy in a decent, sober way, which never is known to be the case after the story commences. And so was Charlotte, his good and true wife. And so also, for aught we know, was young Poole, their infant son and heir, in spite of the lack of experience appertaining to his extreme youth.

But upon the third day of June the second woman had made her appearance. With her came the tragedy, upon which Poole's family, income, reputation, and even good intentions seemed to confer the gigantic proportions of crime. An out-and-out *roué* sins so constantly that those sins seem to dwindle in the eyes of the observer, until if he struggles madly to sin a great sin he seems but to have committed an indiscretion. Poole, on the contrary, had always been a most exemplary young man. And when after years of correct living he fell, his soul was staggered by the monstrous proportions of the

thing. One may as well state that his good intentions might have saved him if he had not had, at the same time, that well-developed sixth sense, which is an insane love of beauty, and which is, no doubt, but a refinement of our sense of utility, as Byron would have us believe, and he ought to know.

There is a something of pleasure which a fine swimmer feels [if only Poole had never learned to swim !] which is absolutely unknown to the timid. The latter is constantly repeating to himself, "Dare I ?" And his mind deals extensively with distance, depth, tide, undertow, current, and other well-forgotten matters. He knows nothing of that exquisite remoteness from self-consciousness experienced by the swimmer, who is so far amphibious as to become indifferent to such considerations.

To such an one the things the other fears are but words caught in the hollow of the wave-cup, and flung to him from bathers at the white surf-edge. He fondles the water, and is treated in return so

benignly that he comes to believe himself its master. He lies upon the rocking waves, and dreams awake such dreams as never come on shore. Effort is not. Ease is. And he is the lover whose mistress is the translucent greenery of wild waste waters. Poole was such a swimmer.

The first of June of the year of which we write, Poole *père* went to Atlantic City with his wife, who was a bit run down, and who had never seemed quite to regain the vitality which she had so generously presented to Poole *fils*. That infant was left in town with his estimable grandmother, who was assisted in the function of his entertainment by a very grand and important nurse. Poole was very glad to get away from the three last mentioned personages. They had, between them, contrived to make him feel very small for some time, the baby and the nurse having appeared simultaneously about six months before. Each morning his wife, the good Charlotte, awaited anxiously at the hotel the appearance of a wire which usually condensed the anxiety of twenty-four

hours to a certainty that all was well with Poole junior.

The morning of the momentous third of June, Charlotte was doing just this thing. She was sitting with clasped hands bracing her nerves for the worst. Each day it was the same, the young mother fully anticipating an evil which had not materialized, and which has not, as yet, done so.

And Poole—was lying, with that insolent assurance which even nature respects, upon the smooth glass of the rollers which further in shore were attacking the bathers in a formidable surf.

He had few things to think about. He was wishing that he had more money —a thought he owned in common with all men. He was wishing that the boy Ernest —his first-born—had looked just a bit less like his estimable grandmother, Mrs. Twombly-Applegate. What the devil did the gods mean by making of his son an example of heredity? For his wife's mother, Mrs. Twombly-Applegate, was the one person in all the world whom genial Jack

Poole honestly disliked. And it got onto his nerves to see his heir look at him with a Twombly-Applegate stare.

And then—Charlotte.

She had asked him, not an hour ago, if he loved her no longer. Why did women ask questions like that? And he found that she had put an idea into his head. *Had* he changed?

Now there is a certain infidelity of thought present in the mind of the most faithful husband, which if realized by the wife would occasion her anguish. It is possible for the male animal to be faithful in point of fact, but the height of fidelity of fancy has never yet been scaled by him. Only a woman of sensitive intuitions grasps the situation, however. That such is the case, is a matter of congratulation. And so, a man is often mentally faithless without himself knowing it. A clever wife can impose upon her husband the belief that she is the one woman of all the world to him, when in sad cynicism amounting to amusement she sees his mental lapses.

In this, the danger of a habit of analysis lies. To look at things on the surface, to accept every-day events in every-day manner, to live in the major and to avoid the minor, is the wise course. There is danger in going back of the returns, for only a god can do so fully. Poole was "different," but he had not imagined that he was changed until Charlotte had bedewed her pillow with tears and announced the fact with lamentation. He was changed because he had had a bad six months of it. Given the environments which beset the young couple before the babe came—and the nurse—and the grandmother, and Poole would have been the same Poole, although there had always been more of contentment than ecstasy in his love for Charlotte. And so there was nothing to do about it. He was a bad husband who had not kept on doing what he had vowed he would do, viz.: love ever. And how could a man be so foolish as to vow such a thing in the first place, Poole wondered. And could he be *made* to "love ever?" and could it be done in the face of a

squalling infant (young Poole never cried except when suffering from colic), and an experienced nurse, not to speak of a Mrs. Twombly-Applegate?

Poole concluded not.

"Heigh-oh!" he said at length, turning over upon his stomach and striking out lazily. "At any rate—they can't bother a fellow out here!"

"I should think not," remarked a voice placidly.

"I beg your pardon!" exclaimed Poole, quite as if he had trod upon a woman's gown in a drawing-room, and staring very hard at a face whose chin was cutting the water bravely, close at his side.

"For what? Because I took your head for a barrel bobbing about in the water? What a big head it is, to be sure! And then—after I saw you were no barrel, but a man, I came on still. I thought you might require assistance." There was a challenge in the mockery of the voice which would never have been accepted if the face at which Poole gazed had been less beautiful. But beautiful it

was, and thus are the sons of men undone.

Suddenly, the woman turned upon her back, rising and falling upon the green Atlantic as composedly as if in a steamer chair upon the deck of a liner. Without a word, yet hardly knowing what else to do, Poole remained beside her. She closed her eyes peacefully. She had the face of an angel upon a stone tomb. But Poole found no trouble in deciding that she was not fashioned of stone, being equally assured that she was no angel. Her arms were over her head. They matched her face. Her hands were clasped beneath her head. Her bathing dress was cut in the French fashion, was of thin silk, and was, naturally, very wet, and consequently clinging.

The costume was old, its material faded, hinting much familiarity with salt water, and just at the shoulder there was a small rent. As the unknown's eyes were closed, Poole felt there could be no indiscretion in decorously observing it. And the woman's form was of the divinest.

"My name is Sophie Stang. What is yours?" the beautiful lips murmured.

"Morley—ah—George Morley!" responded Poole without an instant's hesitation. So easily do we fall in the manner of evil.

Immediately the lips with their deeply tucked in corners unbent in a heavenly smile. There was a gurgle of laughter and she murmured again:

"Ah—quite so—my honest gentleman!"

Poole considered. Here was a woman whose feet and arms were naked, the remainder of her very beautiful person being veiled only in a thin, faded silk bathing costume, which was audacious to the limit of decency, and the woman talked through lips virginal as to purity of curve, to a strange man—himself—whom she met for the first time in the water.

"I am tired, my fair friend," said he, coolly, with perhaps a suggestion of disgust in tone. "I think I'll say good morning and go in. I'll not insult so

splendid a swimmer by any offer of help."

So much for his good intentions.

If he had only left her there without another look, there might have been no story after all. But alas! The woman did not reply for a moment, and when she moved her lips it could not have been her intention to answer his farewell in any way, for she did not open them to speak, but to sing.

Alas and alas for the mischief that embryo sixth sense is capable of bringing about! Develop the idea of utility into an insane love of beauty and add a morbid susceptibility to the power of music! Where are good intentions then? What becomes of them? I declare unto you that Poole forgot he had ever owned any.

Sophie Stang sang softly an air which was afterward presented to New York in the second act of "The Golden Bubble."

> "Pardon all the faults of me
> For the love of long ago—
> Good-bye."

And Poole waited, staring, drinking in

the unearthly sweetness of what was rather a thin voice. But the lips were so beautiful:

> "Not a word for me,
> Not a look or kiss—
> Good-bye!"

The voice warbled on, and Poole still lingered.

Then, even as he waited like a stupid fish, she lay again silent, at rest, with closed eyes. And just as he was drawing one long, deep breath, he saw again a smile tucked into the corners of her perfect mouth, and there was a twang of mockery in it, and it stung him to recognize that she was aware of his presence and that he had hung about her unable to leave the spot after a most pompous farewell. With a last long look of unwilling admiration, he left her, trying indeed to sneak through the tell-tale splashing water before the woman should open her fine eyes.

As he struck out for the shore and his virtue with a powerful regular stroke, he mused to himself:

"What will Charlotte say?"

The fact of the matter was this: Charlotte never commented upon the matter at all. For Poole never told her of it.

* * * * *

Upon the fifteenth day of June Poole had crossed upon the Thirty-fourth Street Ferry with his wife, his child, the child's grandmother, and a heterogeneous collection of maid servants. It was the day set apart for the family flitting from the small town house on Fifty-first Street to their other more commodious home down upon Long Island. Within the limits of a certain village upon the south shore Charlotte owned a cottage which had been left her by her father, and to which each summer of their five years of married life she had returned. Poole had always been down of a Sunday, and the life there was dearer to Charlotte than that in town. There, for the first time, she now took their son. Poole promised to come down often. And he believed that he intended to keep his promise. Perhaps he did. But nothing had been quite right between

Charlotte and him since the day she had asked him if he had not changed. Charlotte's eyes were upon him, questioning, begging, as a woman's pure eyes can do. To the last they implored him, but Mrs. Twombly-Applegate was close at hand, and just as the train moved out of the station young Poole lifted up his voice and wept, and Charlotte turned to him, more mother, in the moment of parting, than wife.

Poole returned alone, crossing the ferry very much wrapped up in a mood. When the boat ran into the slip a hansom caught his eye. The day was hot, the afternoon spoiled for business, and it was too early to find a friend at his club. Hailing the hansom, he ordered the cabman to kill an hour for him in the shady drives of Central Park. Leaning well forward on his elbows, a cigarette in his teeth, he continued his mood. It was hot, with a hint of mugginess, and the town seemed filled with odors, more or less oppressing. Poole grew more and more disgusted with his thoughts, which dwelt chiefly upon the

discomforts of dining in one place and sleeping in another. Dining! It wasn't the dining as much as it was the breakfasting which he dreaded. Why could not cook have been left? No! She must go down on the Island with the rest, and he, who was of no consequence because of being merely the head of the family—he must go each night to a musty closed-up house to sleep, and tumble out, to breakfast, as best he might, at club or hotel or restaurant. He was of no consequence to any one since his son had come upon the scene. And he became so savage in thought that he looked his thought, and a woman, passing, smiled to see him.

It was Sophie Stang, as luck would have it. Her face flashed luminously from a carriage window, and Poole saw it. In a second more they had passed each other.

There is a ripe redness of the rose, haunting, intoxicating with fulness and perfume. And a rose like that seduces with the passion born of the mind and senses. Such a rose was Sophie. And there are other roses—small, sweet blos-

soms often carelessly thrown aside, yet winning from us an emotion of the heart. Of such was Charlotte.

Yet Poole was still ignorant of what was already a fact.

There were two women in his life—and had been since the third of the month.

Ah, the beauty of the first rose! Goodness knows, beauty can sting like a whip, and get into the blood like veritable wine!

And the truth was this: not once since the third of June had John Poole shut his eyes without a demon presenting itself dream-wise. And the demon ever took on female shape, and floated upon waters blue, and had for a mouth a line of curved sweetness, into each corner of which was tucked a smile.

# PART I.

## CHAPTER III.

### IN WHICH THE SINNER REPENTS.

*"This is the tale I have to tell,*
*Show the fellow the way to hell."*

And it was upon those lips that Poole's thought dwelt as he slowly descended the stairs after leaving the child. But the wonder of it and the amazement all lay in this: They had now no charm for him. He could not recall just what their charm had been. Charm—of that sort—has a way of evaporating. And stranger than all, it was to Charlotte now that his imagination turned. It was her face which the women whom he met upon the street all wore. If June had turned his moral sense topsy-turvy, September was setting it upon its legs again.

"Three months! I—am—a—chump!" and at each word Poole brought himself down another stair.

He paused at the entrance of a small

room on the second floor, listening to the voices below stairs. Sophie was singing an air which she had caused to have interpolated in the score of "The Golden Bubble." The words were those to which he had listened upon that morning in June. She was singing slowly, and with a languor born of wine. For Sophie took too much wine.

What were his thoughts as he listened? What are the thoughts of any man when disenchantment has come and is griping his soul and wringing it dry before it tosses it over to the next comer—remorse?

And the words of the song:

> "Pardon all the faults of me
> For the love of long ago—
> Good-bye."

Would to God he might go to Charlotte and implore her thus! He had never expected to put a construction—to find in the words a meaning—which he would long to utilize in such a fashion.

The last word was carried to a high

note, perilously sweet, and held there, and played with, and finally flung slowly away into a silence. It was very pretty. She sang it better than when before the footlights earlier in the night. And amid the stir of the departures which followed and the thanks of some half-dozen men, he heard the loud, boyish voice of Alexander Brand asking for him. But he never stirred, merely cursing him inwardly because of the fact that through his kind offices he had been made a guest of the house where he now stood. He never saw him that he did not long to insult him. So unreasonable is man when he has been given exactly what he has most craved.

He walked into the little room at the door of which he had been standing, determined to see Sophie for some minutes before his departure. He wanted to ask her some questions about the child which had not occurred to him before. He sank upon a low, fur-covered couch, throwing his head back and staring at a ceiling which displayed elaborately in fresco the Apotheosis of Narcissus. The house,

which had been rented for the season by Sophie, had once belonged to a very grand family. Sophie always alluded to that ceiling as "nymphs on toast." Venus was simply indicated amid the clouds of a background. There floated through Poole's mind a vague wish that in life—in his life—she had been thus unobtrusively insinuated. To his fancy, the misty face took on the lines of that belonging to Sophie. As for Echo, he could not see her face. And then, again, his thought travelled to Charlotte. It occurred to Poole that there were worse entanglements in real life than any of the mythological complications with which he was familiar. He groaned, and muttered a few words, which we may be pardoned for supposing to have been :

"Lord be merciful to me—a fool!"

After that he was silent, but his silence was punctuated by the swish of sweeping garments as Sophie came slowly upstairs, still humming :

"Pardon all the faults of me."

A moment, and one of the most beauti-

ful women in all the town stood leaning against the casement of the door looking at him. Without rising, still lounging, his hands in his pockets, he returned her glance. Their story, and the story of the last three months, lay in the look. She seemed very weary, tranquilly devoid of surprise at finding him there, and possibly a bit bored. Her charming eyes were still disfigured by the rouge upon their lids. Gradually a something petulant grew in their expression. She yawned, and threw the flowers she carried behind a chair, but Poole's quick eye caught sight of a card which was attached to them. They were not his flowers, yet of the many bouquets which she had had showered upon her that night she had apparently singled these out by her favor. She advanced slowly and stood before Poole.

"Well?" said she.

"Well?" echoed he.

"You didn't take supper with me. Were you not hungry?"

"No. I preferred seeing you after the

others left, and—I have been talking with the child."

"Drumsticks?" Sophie was too tired to question him in regard to their meeting at that hour of the night—or morning.

"Why that ridiculous name?"

Sophie pouted and made no answer. She was studying him in the mirror, scorning her own wonderful image to do so.

"How came you to allow a child to be so named?" he insisted.

"Why should I answer? Jack, we have been a good deal together for three months. The first you occupied in rhapsodies. The second with long silences, and the third and last with criticisms. To them you seem pleased to add questions—interrogations as to a past with which you can have no concern. I'm tired!"

"So am I. But surely you will answer a few questions about the child—not yourself? And tell me that name—why—"

"Well, then you'll be angry! No? She was not named at all for a year. I was doing the Columbine at—never mind—in

London. The Pierrot was her father. He named her on Christmas night at supper—after the play. A few of the company were supping together at my lodgings. He had been drinking. In serving the fowl we had all refused what you Americans call the drumsticks. It seemed to strike him then that we should call the baby 'Drumsticks.' It was merely a joke—or intended as one. He took the child and went through a mock christening, wetting her forehead with wine, and calling her Drumsticks. And somehow or other the name has stuck to her. I suppose because it fits. It was true. He didn't want her, nor I, nor any one. There! Now you know!"

Sophie mused, with an odd smile curving her lips. Memory was representing once more to her a midnight scene in a cheap London lodging house. She saw again an ill-set supper table whose *pièce de resistance* was a tough and leathery fowl. She saw herself—still in the costume of a Columbine—a Sophie ignorant of a future which was to the Sophie of to-day a very glittering and satisfactory present.

And opposite her at table she saw once more the kindly, whimsical Pierrot, his face still streaked with the white paint of the pantomime, and still oddly enough framed in a huge ruff. There were three others at the table. And all had been more or less tipsy. The child had been asleep in a large hamper, half filled with old properties. And Pierrot had dragged it to light in order to christen it—his innocent little daughter—in the cheap wine, and with drunken mirth, amid the rough jests and hilarity of those player-folk.

"Ah—the child of a Columbine and a Pierrot!" A quickly fading jealousy was in the tone, and also disgust, fatigue. "What was—his other name?"

"Why ask? Why revive ancient history? And what is it to you, anyway?" Sophie was clearly puzzled. She had spoken to Poole several times about the child, and her remarks had met with silence upon his part. As for the fact that he had not seen the girl before, it was largely due to chance. For the rest, Joy had her instructions, and the child had

been kept in the fourth story of the house, with the exception of the hours which she passed each day in taking the air. And daughters *are* awkward to women like Sophie.

"Is he dead?" asked Poole, after a pause.

"Dead! Yes; long ago."

"What are you going to do with her—the child?"

"I don't know. Why should I do anything? She's well enough off as she is. Perhaps—some day—if she only develops voice—I may find her some place on the stage. But I'm afraid there is no voice!" Sophie felt distinctly cross.

"Thank God!"

"You are polite!" Sophie felt that she was insulted, but she was too sleepy to resent with energy. "Has she been complaining?" she added suddenly and sharply after thinking a moment.

"She did not complain."

"But why this sudden interest, may I ask?"

"I have seen her," he answered, briefly.

"And you are much impressed?"

"I liked the little thing."

"I suppose she reminded you of your own."

"That will do!" he exclaimed, roughly.

"Jack!" She fell upon her knees beside him.

"Sophie!"

Her long, polished, bare arms encircled him. Her head, with its glossy blue-black hair, was against his heart, but its beat did not quicken. Through her laces he could feel hers throb. It was a fickle heart. It had beat for a Pierrot once, and others. It had since beat for him. Yesterday for Pierrot, to-day for himself, and to-morrow—his eye travelled to the flowers huddled behind the chair, and noted once more the corner of the card they all but concealed. There is always a to-morrow for a woman whose lips are as graciously curved and who has not forgotten how to smile. Her shoulders rose and fell, and he knew that she was weeping. He looked admiringly at those perfect shoulders, with their opalescent lights

gleaming from the shadow of laces as frail as their wearer. There was a bluish down where the hair melted into the nape of the neck. The edge of her ear shone as delicately white as a camellia petal and was just as bloodless.

"Not a drop of her blood was human,
But she was made like a soft, sweet woman.
* * * Lilith—skirts of Eden.
With her was hell and with Eve was heaven."

As Poole stared at her thus he became conscious that his hands were still within his pockets. He slowly drew them out and placed them one on each of her shoulders. There was no passion in their touch, only kindness and pity. And it was but three months since their first meeting in the blue waters of the Atlantic. She was crying, and after all she was, or had been, a woman. But he said nothing to her, only sat there with a hand on either shoulder, and thought dully that he liked her better when she laughed. Such as she had no business with tears.

"You think you care for me a little

still?" He finally broke the silence with what he felt to be a silly remark.

"*Think!*" cried Sophie, with tragic emphasis.

"Be sensible, can't you?"

"I know—I've seen it coming! You intend throwing me over!"

"Throw you over! Fiddlesticks!" It cheered him immensely to have her break the ice of a subject which had gradually been growing thin. "*Damn* the past! Three months! What are they? In a year's time you'll have as little place for me in your memory as you have to-night for Pierrot."

"I ought never to have told you that!" she said, moodily.

"But the child!"

"Plague take her! I wish—" She hesitated. They were both upon their feet now, his hands still upon her naked shoulders. His eyes calculated coolly the magic of her physical charm. It was great, yet it was all physical. And not one spark stirred the ice of that glance.

Her loveliness had had the grace to en-

thral. Her charm—such as it was—had forged gyves upon his sense which it was now enabled to toss aside. The tender flame in burning had melted his chains. He was cloyed with caresses, and aghast at the price of self-respect, which he had paid for them. He felt a disgust for her, for, to his mind, she embodied his weakness. He had been a chump—an ass—a despicable fool. She influenced him no longer. He was free to look upon her as upon a picture, or a statue, of which every line was an enchantment. She was no less beautiful, yet with only a whimsical sadness, such as one bestows upon all last things, he could have said to her then that good-bye which time was fetching for them in some dim to-morrow.

Sophie's faultless face! Sophie's faulty soul!

"Little sinner"—he swung her gently to and fro by her shoulders. "What did you expect?"

Sophie shook herself free and walked shivering to the fireplace. She could have a chill accompanied with a rain of

tears as easily as she could laugh all of a glow ten minutes later. Poole watched her, but he was not thinking of her.

The child upstairs! He would say a word for it before he left the house that night. There might be that thing—a soul—to consider. Charlotte would have thought so, and to return to clean things, as he had it in mind to do, leaving behind in the wreckage of the summer's storm a little weak woman-child, in whose eyes divine innocence dwelt, seemed to Poole impossible. He must try to do something for the child, and then—

He might go out of that house to-night and never enter it again. But what of the child upstairs, the helpless sport of the tempest of a mother's sin? Was it Quixotic to hope that he could befriend her? Might it not count in his favor on the day when all was judged? And he liked the child. It was a sweet child, and seemed—best of all—to have inherited nothing of its mother. If she—Sophie—had seemed to care for it, all would have been different. Many very bad women,

he had heard, cared for their children—like beasts. But Sophie cared nothing for hers. She had wished it dead since the hour she had first felt the mysterious throb of its being.

And then he tried to explain to himself how it was that he felt such a consuming interest in a child which he had never seen until that night, and for whose mother he cared less than nothing. He brought the full force of his mind to the subject, and he has thought intently of it many, many times since that first night. And it is still—as it was then—a thing which he has never been able to explain. He has given it up long ago. But it was as I have written. That part of this little story is as true as—well as—as the kindliest, tenderest, most unselfish interest you, reader, have ever taken in the smallest, most helpless and suffering thing of which you have ever known. No truer—but as true as that.

And then the child was thin, old, wise, and hungry for affection. In short—all

things which a little female child of seven years ought not to be.

She looked as if she ought to have some one of her own who would be foolish over her. Some one who would rock her to sleep and tell her fairy tales.

And she had—Sophie.

And then Poole thought of Charlotte. Ah, some women were made to lavish love as others were made to be loved. Some were lovers—and for lovers. And others were—mothers. And it was a good thing for the children that all this was so.

"She's such a queer little creature!" broke in Sophie suddenly upon his thoughts, and quite as if his had influenced her own. "She has such ideas! Fancy! She thinks she has a bird in her breast—her heart, you know; she clasps her hands upon it and listens, and is always asking if we, too, hear the *bird*. Fancy!"

"You love her?" [A question for a mother!]

"I? Love her? Let me be honest! No. She never has seemed—my own.

Sometimes I think she is not. She was put out to nurse soon after the christening episode, and for four years I never even saw her. He—Pierrot—used to go and see her. I believe he cared something for her, in a way. He paid her board, and I paid it—whichever one had a little money, you understand. And then I heard that he was dead. And the woman, a very decent person, wanted to keep the child for her own. But I thought I might regret giving her up. I often wish I had left her with that woman. Probably it would have been better.

"Well—I did not," she continued. "And here she is. Since then she has been left to old Joy. Who is Joy? Another decent person?" Sophie smiled. "I always employ most circumspect maids."

Poole looked at his watch. It was two o'clock. He felt the need of sleep and time to think. He longed more and more to do something for Drumsticks, if but to change her name. He walked to the door.

"I'll see—I'll see—" He hesitated.

Sophie drew near him with such a wealth of expression in her lovely eyes as would have deceived any man into believing her loving and lovable. But she was neither. Poole knew it, and looked at her gravely.

"So—it is over?" she faltered.

"What did you expect? You knew it must end!"

"But, so soon?"

"Good-bye."

"Only—oh, Jack!"

"Good-bye!" A cunning gleamed in Sophie's eyes.

"But—the child?" she breathed softly.

Poole hesitated, bit his lip, looked at her keenly, and then answered:

"I'll run in to-morrow afternoon and talk over some plan for her." Then he went away.

Sophie laughed.

# PART I.

## CHAPTER IV.

### INTRODUCING THE WOMAN WHO WAS A WIFE, BUT, MOST OF ALL, A MOTHER.

*"A sweetness clings to all her flesh,*
*Like early grasses steeped in dew;*
*And in her silky hair the fresh,*
*Faint odors that from Heaven she drew."*

CHARLOTTE was the pure woman.

Such a calm brow, such a meek lip, such kindness of glance shone in her dear face as made the old turn to look and little children laugh from sheer happiness. Charlotte was an embodied smile — the smile which would cheer a man, but never tempt him. The Vast Secret of the Eternal Mother dwelt in her heart, and to see her with her baby studying the manifestations of the Man as revealed in him was to see the Madonna. She was akin to nature, as such a woman would be. She loved the mists, the silvery satins of winding roads, the reeds tilting against the

breezes of the salt marsh lands, the messages of nightfall and daybreak, the hoarse whispering of the sea, but a mile distant from the old house at Seascrest. But, above all, she loved her garden. She loved the shady walks, the sunny stretches of velvet lawn, the decorous, prim, old-fashioned flower beds, and the hum and buzz of blundering bees and insects.

There was not one particle of sentimentality about Charlotte, nor anything which was not heartily sensible and completely normal. She was happy, as all such simple people are, because she lived so close to Nature as to partake of her health. And she was lovable, because she was loving, and honest, and true, in the kind of way that little children know and recognize at once. And in the kind of way a sick soul knows and longs for with a longing unutterable. In short, she was unlike the usual young woman who plays a part in a story. She made you think of brisk, waving grain, or a breath of summer morning in green woods, and that in-

effable odor of pure mother earth after warm rains.

Charlotte's eyes were small, pale brown, and very kindly, her nose neat, and in harmony with the rest of her face, which is the proper thing for a nose to be. Her mouth was fresh-looking, healthy, pleasing in a rich laugh, which showed all of her clean, white, rather square teeth. She laughed easily, and with a merry gurgle to end with, which seemed to draw out the merriment of her thought, and to linger over it.

It is only the unsullied soul who can be in touch with Nature as was Charlotte, for sin makes us blind and deaf to the simple delights of the fragrant earth—delights which cost nothing, and have a power to bless.

All through the summer Poole had avoided Seascrest upon this plea and that. He was too tired for the trip, he was too busy, and he declared that business would go to the ever ready bow-wows if he neglected it. And his visits had become more and more a rare thing. Charlotte

felt a vague unrest, as one feels the coming of a storm. There was an ominous lull, broken only by the fitful flashes of Mrs. Applegate's tongue. That her indignation was natural and righteous we cannot deny. As for Charlotte, she was too proud to say anything. She would wait and—trust. And soon, very soon, it would be all right. And that horrid business which was keeping her Jack in town so much through all the long, hot days would arrange itself at last, as business always did.

And so it had limped away lamely, this summer, which September stared at with hot, baked eyeballs.

But Mrs. Applegate had her suspicions. She even knew men. However, when one knows more than the people about them, and one is unable to conceal that fact, one only gets one's self disliked. And Mrs. Applegate, knowing this, among other things, bode her wee. But there was an occasional spit, as of water upon fire, which Charlotte overlooked. No other

woman was ever seen who could overlook as much as Charlotte.

It was a thing to make a broken heart heal to see Charlotte of a summer morning, intoxicated with the dew of her own life, anxiously leaning over her roses near the garden path, her young child in her arms, stretching his baby fingers to the gay darlings of the flower bed, and secure in mother-love.

To Charlotte the death of a flower was a pain, a sting; a blight upon a blossom, a regret. And her delight in the luxurious unfolding of a promising bud was a thing belonging to her own pure heart.

Charlotte, in crisp, morning muslin, with a bit of pink about it, matching the health which had returned to her dear cheeks and the bald head of her child, was like an eternal morning. And to see her thus, as Mrs. Applegate saw her, knowing that the young husband who should have shared the picture cared not for it, or at least failed to avail himself of an opportunity of admiring it, was to

a mother—Mrs. Applegate was a mother and a good one—like swallowing a toad. It wouldn't swallow.

And yet Poole had some few times watched his wife and son thus from the breakfast room window on those rare mornings which had chanced to find him at Seascrest. And he had watched them lately with a mingling of pleasure and pain—pleasure at the picture they made, and pain at his own isolation. For these people were far apart, sin having set the feet of the man outside of any garden of pure delight.

Yet, such lives as that of Charlotte make bridges upon which less holy natures may at last cross and find again lost Eden, and heaven.

There was little color in the lips of Charlotte, and nothing sensual in the radiance of her soft brown eyes. And Poole often owned thoughts which were a sacrilege in the presence of her splendid white soul. Such thoughts could not live long in the atmosphere which she created. If she had been with him at the

first to encourage his good intentions! Well, she was not; if she had been—he was clean enough to have preferred white to scarlet. With her, and about her, gentle deeds flourished like her roses wherever she carried her smiles. But Poole had been separated from her by a deadly trio: "Baby, Applegate and Company." And he was very, very weak —in a word, he was a man.

All the good in Poole belonged to Charlotte. But it seemed that there had lurked in his nature a good deal of commonplace evil. He loved Charlotte—had always loved her—with the love which her personality evoked. That there was another side to the fellow was his misfortune no less than hers. She had been his star. But Thales came to grief while star gazing. And Poole, with his eyes upon a star, had walked into a puddle. Now his boots were muddy. And that made his star out of the question.

What the other woman—what Sophie—was to him does not matter. The less the pen deals with her the more ink will be

saved for Drumsticks. For, after all, this is intended as a story of that sweet child.

Poole, Charlotte, and Sophie have to do with the common storm which is whirled into life by the winds Desire and Satiety. Such storms are old revolting stories, so complicated with motives, pregnant with heredity and circumstance, that a humble pen does well to touch upon them delicately, thus evading heavy responsibilities. It is with the child mine would linger—a small reed tossed upon mighty waters — Drumsticks — whom nobody wanted, whose mother was a Columbine, and whose father was a Pierrot.

And yet, how tell of her and omit the others ?

Ah ! if, when you cast this little story aside, you will but regard my difficulty in this matter with charity ! If the shadows of the picture may be but suggested in Sophie ! If the pale color which touched the life of Drumsticks shall remind you in pitying fashion of that kind sinner—Poole ! If the high lights, shining to touch tenderly her pain, recall the

gracious womanliness of Charlotte! And if, more than all, you shall recall with something of affection a small female child, who was called Drumsticks because "nobody wanted her," the pen will not have entirely failed.

The day following the night which witnessed the meeting of the man of the story with Drumsticks was a heavy one. Poole staggered under it until it was time to call upon Sophie, as he had promised. Then he despatched her a hasty begging off, and wired Charlotte to expect him.

During the day he had been seized with a great longing to see and be with Charlotte. To touch her! Was there not healing in her presence?

The ferry, the ensuing ride by train, the jolt to the house after reaching Seascrest in Charlotte's ridiculously high English cart, the gathering gloom, the distant complaint of the sea, all got on his nerves, and he swore softly to himself. He was afraid to whistle. His tune might take on an air of "The Golden Bubble"—

"Pardon all the faults of me."

He felt that he was going to a temple to besmirch the altar by laying upon it a copy of Baudelaire. Ah! if he could only tell Charlotte all, and leave it to her. Let her tell him at once if he had better go hang himself. If he told her—what would she say? How would she look? He entered the house like a thief. Although Charlotte anticipated his arrival, the everlasting nursery had interfered with the father's welcome. He ground his teeth savagely as he heard the elephantine Applegate tread overhead, and then nearly fell to weeping as he distinguished Charlotte's soft singing, and recognized a bye-low. He threw himself into a chair and waited in the little cottage library.

The room was not yet lighted for the night, but upon Charlotte's little bandy-legged writing desk a candle stood, and its saffron gleam fell upon a photograph of Poole, which he had given her in college days, while love was young. He looked at it critically, as if regarding the face of an entire stranger.

Had he ever looked like *that?*

"I ought to have died then," he groaned to himself, with a twitching of the lips, which drew his mouth into the dismal semblance of a smile. "Since then I've made the acquaintance of the serpent. There was no slime on me then! 'Twouldn't make a bad portrait of St. John!—adding a halo!" And he sat despising himself.

Finally Charlotte entered the room.

"You here, Jack!" (Delight.)

"As you see." (Gloom.)

Soft robed, purely fragile, colorless, and sweet as the Quaker twilight of the evening, Charlotte made him welcome with all the heart dwelling in her soft, white bosom. But he, poor wretch, felt it was all for the Jack she thought him to be—the St. Jack—and not Jack the cur, which he knew himself to be. And so her warm greeting only ground his spirit to earth.

He tried to tell her all that night, before sleeping, but only ended in groaning and looking so white that Charlotte flew for the hot water bag and insisted upon symptoms of appendicitis Alas, he wished

it had been as she feared! If a surgeon's knife could cut away evil memories, regrets and sin, then might each human do a little private, amateurish hackling.

"I'll tell her in the morning," thought Poole, and, turning, tried to sleep.

That night all the casements shook. The mad winds came up from the sea and toyed with the little cottage, and called fearful threats through unwary keyholes. The chill came in and laid weird fingers upon the embers. The air throbbed with sounds. These things are bought and sold with country houses.

And Poole lay sweating in remorseful terror, dreading the telling of his story, and knowing that it was not for him, as for other men, to go about grinning over his escapade, and to kiss first a Sophie and then a Charlotte. He was too honest a bad man for that. And some day, if not to-morrow, he must tell his wife.

Finally, he fell into a fitful sleep, and, dreaming, dreamed that he stood beside a hideous grave-digger, who was laughing as he evaded his—Poole's—inquiries in re-

gard to the grave the fellow was digging. Was it for Sophie, or for Charlotte? He would know! And the grave-digger would give no answer, only laughing more like a devil than ever. And Poole began to dread with a mighty dread that it was the grave of the sweet Charlotte. And he awakened abruptly, with every pulse bounding. The room was black—black with the darkness of the hours directly following midnight. He listened, but could not hear the gentle breathing for which he waited. Softly, he raised himself upon one elbow and leaned over her pillow. Something dark lay there, and his hand sought carefully for the silky head and quiet cheek. Yes; she was there. She was alive, warm, and sleeping.

And he must rob her in the morning of the power to sleep like that!

She would suffer less if he killed her now.

And John Poole fell back upon his pillow and wept scalding, bitter tears—not a

woman's easy tears; but a man's tears—salt and tainted.

And in the morning he left for town by an early train, and without a confession.

# PART I.

## CHAPTER V.

### SHOWING HOW THE SINNER POSED.

*"Thou little maiden, I thank thee much;*
*And well I would thou should'st pray for me;*
*But I am a sinful man, and such*
*As ill should pray for thee."*

And for the remainder of the month Poole found one set of excuses to keep well away from Seascrest, and another which gave him many half-hours with Drumsticks, away up in her fourth floor front.

Perhaps a man must have lost all of his self-respect, have had his self-love bitterly wounded, and then have been loved at first sight by an innocent little female child "because he was good," to understand just what comfort the society of Drumsticks was to John Poole. His vanity, or what there was left of it, had been tickled by her preference, as vanity always is by that of a pure-souled child, or even the unsought friendliness of a dog. Chil-

dren and dogs have a reputation for discernment.

And so if he saw Sophie less it was because he saw more of Drumsticks, and not that he remained away from the house. And more and more through those ebbing days of September it was to see the child that he came. He ran in during the morning hours on his way down town to his office, and found time for an hour with her during the early twilights before Sophie had a chance to return from her regular afternoon drive. And the attraction between the man and the child was one of those instinctive, marvellous, genuine, and never-to-be-explained things which can hardly be described.

There was nothing of Sophie in Drumsticks.

If Heredity had a finger in the matter, that finger had traced the child's personality directly to a Columbine and a Pierrot. The graceful sweetness, innocent frolic, and underlying sadness of the dear childish pantomime seemed to be her inheritance. It was as if she had been im-

maculately conceived of Christmas-tide by a genial spirit of good will. And it was her charm, as well as her misfortune, that she loved easily.

The memories which Poole retained of Drumsticks are largely of these weeks.

Daughter of a harlot, she possessed a tender, graceful wistfulness for all that was true and good. Explain it who can! Daughter of a clown, the delicate, frail tragedy of her being had about it the fragrant revelation of innocence. Were the mother at heart the light of love she seemed—were the father the imp of darkness—how explain the elusive grace of that childish character?

And it was a singular fact that while the thoughts of the child's loneliness away up in the dismal fourth floor, amid the gloomy cheapness of the house, brought Poole continually within the circle of Sophie's spell, his mind grew to be more and more with Charlotte. If it had not been for the child at this time it is certain he would have broken entirely with Sophie.

The twilight was their favorite hour.

After a day of wretchedness, routine forcing his mind to fulfil official duties, with the feeling that his misery was written upon his face, unwilling to be with Sophie, unworthy to seek Charlotte, he found a strange consolation in the company of the child. There, at the window of that fourth floor front room, they would sit, the child's round head fitting itself to the hollow between his cheek and shoulder, watching the twilight fade and the street lamps shine out below them. They talked much confidingly, trusting also to long silences, the latter pleasing the man best; and during them, when his thoughts wandered hellward, it may have saved him more than he ever knew to have had the feel of Drumsticks' arm about his neck. And nothing would have pained him more than to have Drumsticks know that he was not to be loved "because he was good."

There, before the trees in the small park opposite became entangled in the dusk, they gravely discussed them. Drumsticks had named them, and they always spoke

of them, calling each by name and weaving many quaint fancies in regard to them, quite in the whimsical manner peculiar to the child. The season was late, a hazy warmth still pervading the earth, and the leaf and branch of her friends were not as yet much changed. One, an elm, was stripping itself of its greenery, however. The child had named it after Sophie's manager, a person whom she feared and whom Poole disliked for his coarse presence and bulging, frog-like eyes. And the two—child and man—professed themselves delighted with the havoc a first frost had played with his namesake.

"See! see! he is losing his coat! *Goody!*" And Drumsticks clapped her hands.

"But Fanny is still, oh, so pretty!" she added. "Fanny" was a green privet.

A dark pine had been made a namesake of Poole's. A maple was called "Joy," and a lilac "Sophie," because it was graceful. And Poole himself had selected a delicate silver birch, scarce as high as the

child's head, to bear the name of Drumsticks.

"Such a nice little tree! And such a horrid name!" said she, after deliberation; "but I like it to be so near the dear pine!" It was a slight, swaying thing, and really leaned quite as if for protection toward the larger full-grown tree.

"Just as I do—to my Play-papa!" she would murmur, affectionately, clinging to him in a transport of gratitude.

And so this distracted, guilty-minded man lingered with his small friend, each soothing the other's sense of loneliness. The room in which they sat through these hours was a commonplace one with two beds, one of which, the smaller, was occupied by the child, and the other by Joy. Upon the foot of that belonging to Drumsticks was usually thrown a blanket. This blanket was of fine gray wool, with an arabesque of white along its borders. It was worn shabby in places, but was still excessively soft and comforting to the touch, and was a part of Drumsticks' earliest remembrance. To its ample folds she had

turned when too young to talk, a dumb consoler for each hurt of mind and body. It was associated in Joy's mind with the episode of her first meeting with her young charge.

"*That* is what you are here for!" Sophie had said, and had pointed one taper finger to a heap of wool upon a hearth-rug.

"That" turned out, upon examination, to be a small child, who had cried herself to sleep, huddled within the folds of a gray blanket. As time went on it was found impossible to divorce the child from the blanket. If mislaid, the London lodging house, where they then were, was filled with infantile shrieks.

Drumsticks no longer shrieked. Her griefs had become quieter, if no less bitter. But the blanket still existed, a consolation paramount.

The child was always dressed in the height of fashion at this period, although her immediate environment of living rooms was so plain. This elaborate wardrobe was the only thing about her in

which Sophie evinced any interest. But the fine things never seemed to belong to Drumsticks. They were selected with more of an eye to picturesqueness than to any exquisite daintiness, and her pale little round face smiled out above her fripperies in a remote and superior way which was not the least of her attractions. As Poole's eyes rested upon her grandeur, his mind reverted to the plainly wrought, fine, hand-finished raiment which he had seen Charlotte select for their son.

One afternoon, about four or five of the clock, Poole found his way up the four flights of stairs to the door of the room. Drumsticks stood at the window, her face pressed flat against the pane, while from one hand trailed the gray blanket, telling Poole the story of some grief, or a battle royal with Joy.

"Miss will?"

"No!"

"Miss likes her own way!" grumbled Joy.

"That's one of my nicest faults!" com-

posedly announced the child, with her face still against the pane.

Whatever the point may have been, Joy did not care to press it, and seeing Poole, left the room to seek more congenial associates.

Drumsticks was absorbed in her window, one hand holding the blanket, and the other pressed tightly against her heart. It was a frequent gesture with her. There were a few cobweb clouds trailing across the sunset, suggesting the approach of a huge black spider, who should shortly bring darkness after him. Pallid lights quivered on the edges of façades, and the crowds in the street below seemed shadows trooping through some ravine. The street was sulky, unwilling to take on the good humor of gas jets. And Drumsticks waited at the window, her young soul soaking itself in sensations and impressions which it did not understand.

Her ear caught Poole's step as he entered, and she ran to him with a quick change of mood, dropping her blanket, and forgetting all but the joy of his arrival.

"I was waiting for you—I knew you would come," she cried.

"What were you doing while you waited?" asked Poole carelessly, thinking to hear of a dispute between herself and Joy.

"Oh, just thinking—thinking till my thinks were sprained!"

"Here — what's this hand doing?" And drawing her to his knee, he tried to remove the hand she still held upon her breast.

"There's a little bird—sometimes it goes to sleep—then I don't feel it. But when it wakes up it begins to hop and jump. Feel it! Put your ear close—so!"

Poole pressed his ear firmly against the tender childish breast, as he had so often done before. Her heart was beating rapidly, and with a harsh sound. Drumsticks was the unfortunate possessor of an emotional, nervous temperament, and the least excitement altered its action.

"Is it all right?" she asked, puzzled by the thought she saw in his face.

"Why, of course, small person! It's a bully good little bird, that!"

And then he hugged her, and took her upon his knee, and they had much conversation of a highly important nature in regard to the tooth which had come out that day, when she was biting an apple. Joy had told her that another would replace it. This she was inclined to doubt until reassured by Poole.

As they sat they heard faint sounds from below stairs, suggesting the return of Sophie from her drive. The man and child sitting together in the dark room listened without comment to the voices. Poole peered at his watch, leaning to the fading window square as he did so. He found that his hour was up. He must leave. Drumsticks clung to him as he passed down the stairs. Sophie saw them through her doorway and called them in. She had thrown off her rich dress, and was resting herself in a corsetless, loose, white negligé, its saffron ribbons being carelessly untied, exposing her neck and breast. Her hair, being uncoiled, fell in a disorderly mass upon those wonderful

shoulders. Drumsticks would never be as beautiful.

The child regarded her gravely, troubled and uneasy at this marked disorder of attire in Poole's presence. And he was no less embarrassed. But Sophie was at ease and inwardly amused as she saw that he was afraid she might forget the child, and offend by an offered caress.

She busied herself arranging a new shade upon an enormous lamp which she had caused to be lighted. It was composed of countless masks, most of which had opera ball histories, and all of which were decorated with autographs. Among them were monks and devils, faces grotesque, not pleasing, smiling scarlet-lipped satin affairs, and others were bits of velvet with slits for eyes, and frills of black and white lace. The rosy light shed by the silken lining of the shade shone through the apertures of oblique eye-holes, and the cavities curved into exaggerated smiles representing the mouths of the masks, tinging Sophie's perfectly chiselled features with pearly tints.

She touched the masks lightly with the tips of her fingers, giving with retrospective smiles some small incident relative to her possession of each. Poole found it impossible to resist admiring the picture the woman made, although his whole nature revolted at the license of her remarks, her dress, and her indifference to the presence of her little daughter. She, catching his expression and laughing at it, suddenly assumed the pose of "The Woman of Masks," a picture for which she had stood as a model in Paris, and murmured audaciously:

"*Je t'aime! Je t'aime!*"

He did not answer. But Drumsticks looked from one to the other, and said quaintly:

"It's French! and I haven't got as far as that!"

Sophie burst into a peal of musical, mocking laughter at the double construction which she immediately placed upon the child's utterance. The child's innocent words, followed by the mother's laugh, jarred upon Poole hideously. He felt

wretchedly unhappy. Bidding Drumsticks run away upstairs again, he watched the handsomely dressed child clamber up the long flight. He preferred the dreary emptiness and darkness of the fourth floor for her to the moral atmosphere where they were. He did not return to Sophie's room, but she followed him to the hall, negligently wrapping herself in her theatre wrap.

"Was there ever such another fool over a child?" she said jealously. "Why don't you adopt her yourself? Heaven knows, I'm willing!"

He paused abruptly, his hand upon the stair rail.

"Do you mean that?"

"Why not?"

"Would you give her to me and promise not to claim her again?"

She was leaning upon the balustrade, her face in shadow, and turning the heavily jewelled rings she wore over and over upon her fingers. Brilliant white and cardinal flashes gleamed from them, and

she seemed more occupied with them than with her words.

"Why not?" she repeated, as before; then, seeing that he was in earnest, she became more thoughtful. "Why not?" she whispered. "You would be good to the little thing. She's your kind!" Then a cynical smile followed as she added: "What would *she* say?"

He paid no attention to her last question, but grasping her hands he turned her face to the light.

"Sophie, it would be a serious business! If I took her it would be to keep her! There could be no backing out, no change of mind!"

"Fiddlesticks! If I once arranged her future well, and got rid of the responsibility, I should not want her back?"

And, looking in her face, he saw that she was serious.

He drew a long breath.

"We'll talk this over again."

And as he went out of the front door he looked up to where a flood of pink light seemed to centre about the wonder-

ful face and form of Sophie, as she leaned, still smiling, over the balustrade watching his departure.

She had never shown the slightest trace of regret over the matter of his indifference to her charms since the night of the first performance of "The Golden Bubble." It had been, and still was, a great success, and would probably run until Christmas, when a new extravaganza would be put upon the same stage, in which Sophie was to have a part. He had gathered this from her, and knew that the company were already rehearsing. Further than that she had said nothing to him of her affairs. And it was with the most smiling good humor that she saw his brief infatuation for herself changed into a friendship for the child. Now it struck him for the first time that she might have had the adoption of Drumsticks by himself in mind all of the time. It is probable that to the shrewd Sophie the idea had occurred before this evening.

Poole walked down the block toward Broadway, with his hands behind him,

grasping his stick. The streets were crowded, many pedestrians carrying umbrellas, as the mist was gradually congealing into a cold rain. The wet dripped from the façades and steeples. The grime of it! Dirty Manhattan, lying like a trollop in the embrace of encircling rivers, while her heart reeked with the secret soul-tragedies of sin, even as her bells of a Sunday rang out angelic chimes!

It would surely be something to save one little white soul out of all this filth!

Sleek, well dressed, leisurely, and wretched, he was perhaps envied of many as he passed on his way. And, in mind, he was picturing the last four months to himself—a sort of sad chiaroscuro—never to be eliminated from his past. And in a monotone ran the accompaniment to this thought:

"Why not?"

In order to save Drumsticks from the wreck he must tell Charlotte all, and at once. She would never recover her confidence in him. It would mean the death of that beautiful thing. But he would re-

cover a certain portion of his self-respect. And Drumsticks would be safe. For Charlotte would take her, and the child would lead a happy life, and grow to be a true and good woman.

On the other hand, he might do as other men about him did—were doing—*cover it up,* forget it—if he could. And the child? Let her go to the devil! And she would! Sophie would see to that.

He could not do this. Ah, Charlotte!

He would—he would tell her all. He knew his Charlotte! The royal nature of her! The everlasting tenderness of her! And her good will to all—especially—little children.

If the Charlottes only knew how much better the John Pooles love them after having met and loathed the Sophies! Or perhaps one might say how much more they appreciate them!

Acting on a resolution thus born of impulse, and nourished by desperation, Poole took that night's nine o'clock train for Seascrest. And he went with the determination to tell Charlotte all. And if she

should tell him to go away into the hopelessness of an existence without her, he knew her well enough to know that she would take Drumsticks. And he hoped that out of the black night which covered him a new day might dawn for the child.

As he settled himself in his car chair he shook out his paper and glanced at its date. It was that of the last day in September.

# PART I.

## CHAPTER VI.

### CONTAINING A CONFESSION.

*"Oh, blame me not that I*
*Have been a shipwrecked man!*
*You little know how high*
*The tide and current ran!"*

It must be a very hard thing to tell one woman of another when you and she both know that other has no business whatever to be in the enclosure you ironically call your life, but which you inform yourself is hell.

If Charlotte had but been of a suspicious nature! It would have been so much easier for Poole to be dishonest. But when a sweet woman trusts a bad man, even while he is glutted with sin, and a sweet child loves him on sight "because he is good," strange things happen, especially if the man happens to have a vein of honesty imbedded in the rock of his nature. Honesty is a terrible thing. A man who is born honest can never be bad with a particle of comfort in his badness.

Still, if Charlotte had not been just Charlotte, and if it had not been for the child, Poole would probably have gone on through life like many another devil-prodded man, with a secret as big as an Edam cheese, masticated, but illy-digested by his soul.

As it was, once settled in his determination to confess, a fury of haste seized him. Should he never reach Seascrest? He missed the train which he expected to catch, and was forced to wait in the station another hour—the longest hour he ever knew. And during it he had nothing but thoughts to occupy him.

Morals are a matter of comparison, and the person who might feel himself a saint in a concert hall would feel a sinner in a cathedral. So Poole, who, when with Sophie, felt himself oppressed with the weight of his own moral superiority, became convinced of his obliquity when even in thought he approached Charlotte.

And he was going to tell her all.

That from one point of view it might have been better to have saved her the

pain was true, but Poole was beyond discussing that with himself. He was filled with the madness of a desire to recover his lost honesty and end the lie of it all. A man may be bad with a something good about him which shall eventually save him. So he may be good with a something bad about him which shall ultimately work his destruction. That John Adzit Poole was a bad man there was no shadow of doubt. But he had as much which was not purely evil as may lie in inbred honesty. And there is nothing so well calculated to destroy the peace of mind of a whole family as one really honest person within it, when that person has gone wrong.

A confession would put Poole square with his conscience, as it was also associated with repentance; and it was this honest desire of his to throw off deceit which was his own personal saving. But that confession was to ruin many fair things for Charlotte, such as faith, and trust, and a blessed ignorance of evil. Might not some man have been strong

enough to roast on in a simmering hell, cheerfully offering the devil his own soul, so such a woman be spared the awakening?

There are two classes of sin. One we commit feeling the greatest horror lest the world should discover it. And we say of it: "God would forgive it, as he made us — human!" The second class the world chuckles over and shares with us, but the soul has an uneasy conviction that the good God's point of view would be different. Poole decided that his belonged to the first class, and he felt that if Charlotte would overlook it he would not worry about any heavenly forgiveness. Since Eden, more forgiveness had been asked and bestowed upon souls for that particular sin than for any other.

But Poole's sin was to lose him an Eden which he had at first valued but lightly, and whose worth he was finally to realize with the despair of sickening loss.

That evening—not daring to risk a wakeful night, during which he was afraid his resolve might weaken as once before —he told Charlotte all.

How he took the heart of her, and tore and wrung it with the anguish of his tale, I cannot tell. That he would have died rather than have hurt her so cruelly, is as trite as his weakness. But he had to live on, and it was not in the nature of the man to be able to live a lie. And so he told what was a strange, wild story for a man to tell, and for a woman to hear. It blistered the page of life upon which it was written. It showed the pure Charlotte the stress of a man's unruly passion for the first time. It opened to her astonished vision the weakness of the will of him, along with the truth that dwelt in his nature.

For the first time she knew of the sphinx-woman—she with the female breast and face and body of beast. The black cloud of knowledge came and rested upon Charlotte, but through and above it she lifted loving eyes—lifted them skyward, and so saw the end was not of this earth, and seeing, was enabled to forgive.

A something went out of life for her, and a something entered in. Along with

the bewilderment of a first jealousy of woman came, like a straw upon dark waters, a yearning pity for a child.

And for the man—pity also—and forgiveness.

But—poor Poole! It was the pity and forgiveness which left him no longer the One Man, but a miserable creature to be looked down upon in mercy, and never up to in respect. So—John Poole lost his Eden, and felt it, and knew it, and was never to forget it.

The little story grows a sad one, although one does not like to have it so. But sweetness, and innocence, and tender hearts are no protection from the invader grief. And this story is necessarily sad, as it is true. And there are alive to-day those who, if they chance upon it, will throw their memory back into the years and recognize it as such. The Charlotte and the Sophie still live. The one devoted to her son, who often makes with her a pilgrimage to where, under grass green enough for forgetfulness, a sinner sleeps. A kind sinner whose heart was too hot,

and whose mind was too generous to insure just judgment from those whom he injured.

And dead he possesses a something which was never entirely his in life.

For that gentle woman often instructs her son that he is to be good—like his father. Thus are sins forgiven to the dead by the living, when the living are women, and have warm bosoms sheltering tender hearts. As for Sophie, she sang in a minor part at Covent Garden not long ago. That she remembers best Poole or Pierrot—who can say?

# PART I.

## CHAPTER VII.

### SHOWING HOW THE CHILD SEEMINGLY PROFITS BY THE SIN.

*"As a silver thistle, whirling, wind-blown,*
*Is by frail chance on a fair hill-side sown!"*

THE strangest condition which Charlotte made in regard to their adoption of Drumsticks was that she herself should see and talk with the mother of the child.

And before Poole had recovered from his amazement at this, he was informed by Sophie that unless she should meet his wife she should most emphatically refuse to surrender the child to her care.

"Would you expect me to give her up to one whom I had never seen?" she demanded virtuously.

Now, this was the thing of all others which Poole most dreaded. The man does not feel complacency at the idea of the two women in his life meeting for a chat. It was distinctly unpleasant. He was not

sure of what Sophie might or might not say to Charlotte. But the women had their way in the matter.

And each demanded the meeting of him in the name of Drumsticks, but each was actuated by another motive—curiosity.

Can one believe that Lilith and Eve never met? Aye, and gazed each at each with hungry, curious eyes?

Sophie willed to see this immaculate virtue which men respected, and—left to weep at home. And, as for Charlotte, she was no less inquisitive in regard to this incarnate mystery—one of those strange creatures who had only to lift a pencilled eyebrow to steal one's husband. And yet—what could two beings from such different worlds find to say to each other?

But the two women had their way in the matter.

What passed between them we shall never know. Poole never did, and could only recall that the visit gave him a very bad half-hour. Each had something which the other envied, for Sophie pos-

sessed what Charlotte never had—beauty. And Charlotte owned what Sophie had forever lost—virtue. Add to this the fact that each had loved the same man in her own way, and it is not difficult to conceive that the conversation must have been a rare one.

As its result, Drumsticks was transferred from one house to another upon the day following.

The parting between Drumsticks and her mother was characteristic. The child clung tightly to Poole's hand, who had come to fetch her. Sophie cried softly, picturesquely, and then fell into a sort of purring rage.

As for Drumsticks, she took it all quite as a matter of course. Not one thing which happens in the lives of happily commonplace children had ever happened to her.

She considered the matter very gravely as she sat by Poole's side in the cab. All her old belongings had been left behind at Charlotte's request, who wished to surround the child with an entirely new environment—all save the gray blanket.

And she was to leave Sophie forever—that odd word which was too long for Drumsticks to understand, as it is for most of us —and she was going to leave—also forever —Joy, and the room where she had lived so long in the fourth story of an ugly house, and she should never see it again, and she was very glad of all this, especially as she was going to live with her Play-papa—always—always.

She looked blissfully at him as she thought this, and he caught the glance, and it made her strange affection for him, and his for her, seem a holy thing.

The child was very quiet throughout the trip to Seascrest. Poole remembered afterward how she clung to him while crossing over the ferry, and how she had sat upon the car seat in the train, with her brown shoes thrust out, heels together, and her small hands folded decorously in her lap. Her lips were compressed, her eyes solemnly observant of everything. And during the drive over to the house from the station, she had sighed often, with one hand upon her heart, breathing

in the cool salt-fog, and watching, with quickly shifting glances, each glimmering light, and the long, black hedges which defined the properties of the various country houses. Then had come the crunching of gravel as they turned into a neat driveway, which at last brought them to a doorway from whence shone a cheerful glow, suggesting firelight. For although the days are still of summer, the October nights are chill down upon Long Island.

And then—Charlotte, who only impressed Drumsticks upon that first night as a something sweet-smelling, soft, and warm, whose voice was a caress. Into the embrace of this rare person she was cuddled, and cradled, bewildered and charmed.

Ah, that night! That night! Happy Drumsticks.

An hour later Poole was left alone in the library downstairs; there was the stir which tells of the introduction of the unusual into a methodical family life. He listened as he paced the floor with thoughts burning to ashes like the cigar between his fingers.

With the nurse Clara, as with Poole junior, Drumsticks was an immediate success. That it had been so with her son was a pleasure to Charlotte, and leaving the two children together, she stole down to where Poole sat in the shadow. She stood for a moment in silence; then, after exclaiming against his remaining in the dark, she hesitatingly added:

"Jack—that name of hers—that ridiculous name—what can be done about it?"

Poole deliberated. He felt ill and thoroughly miserable, and quite in the mood to regret having brought the child to his house. He was inclined to think it had been absurdly Quixotic. He avoided Charlotte's eyes, feeling that he should never care to look in them again.

"I—we—cannot go on calling her Drumsticks," she added.

"I had not thought of it—I have not given much—I'm afraid there will be much of which I have had no forethought. But—call her what you like, Charlotte. It can do no harm."

"And you? What are you to be to her?

Isn't it best that the 'Play-papa' should be dropped?"

"As you like. It is all in your hands, Charlotte. I will try and carry out any plans you consider proper."

She stood thinking.

"It will have to be thought out little by little. I've told Clara that she is the child of a friend of yours, that the father is dead and the mother unable to care for her properly, and that for that reason we have taken her. As far as the story goes, it is true enough."

"Tell her—tell others—what you like," he said, dejectedly.

"But one wishes to be truthful—if possible, Jack. And we ought both to say the same thing of her."

"I know—I know."

"I shall say as little as possible. There will be a—gossip—as you said that night. People will talk. They will say—there is a story. But we are prepared for that," said Charlotte, bravely. "And it will all die away after a bit."

Poole nodded. The dusk hid his

wretched face from her eyes. And she! He had been shocked that night to notice the change in her. Her lassitude, her gray pallor! She was sweet—she would always be sweet—but the fire—the color—the freshness—all were missing. She was like a rose still, but like a rose which had been pressed in a book. And he had done it.

After lighting some candles, and ringing for lamps, Charlotte glanced at the clock, immediately disappearing, murmuring something about the children's bedtime.

It is a trite saying that man only realizes how much he has loved a woman when he has lost her, or fears to do so. Yet Poole watched Charlotte leave the room, following her form with hungry wistfulness, as if all he prized in life went with her.

He remembered when the happiness he had felt with her seemed to him like fattening upon monotonous fields of serenity. It had not satisfied his nature. It had been restful and full of peace. And he had grown sick unto death of it

all. And now—it seemed so beautiful a thing—and was forever out of reach. To a nature, to a temperament like Poole's, such spiritual meadow lands of smiling pastoral quiet would only be endurable *after* the tempest. The tempest had come and gone. He had had his fling amid its fierceness. And he had come at last to prize serenity, peace, and quiet, only to find the way to those blessings closed. These are life's little ironies.

Charlotte had not one particle of temperament or any other nonsense about her. She represented rest, clean thoughts, and purity. And there had been a time when he had tired of these things.

"I was a cur—a dirty cur!" he exclaimed, bitterly. "And I deserve all I am getting!" He tossed his cigar into the garden, opening the window to do so, and glad for the touch of frosty air. It fell among some geraniums, and he watched it shine for a moment before it died out.

Upstairs, Charlotte was singing to the children:

"Little ones to Him belong;
They are weak, but He is strong."

Poole closed the window and listened. In another moment he heard Drumsticks singing away like a young bobolink, trying to follow Charlotte, lilting the tune, fumbling it, dropping it, then catching it again with a rush. And, above all, so happy in it!

And it seemed then as if all the sin and misery had resulted in a great good to an innocent child.

Poole hoped this, although in the short time she had been beneath his roof the knowledge had come to him that her mere presence was to be a constant reminder to him—and to Charlotte — of his guilt. For through it he had found Drumsticks. The voices upstairs continuing, Poole felt himself drawn toward them. There was nothing morbid but what must find healing and comfort in the presence of Charlotte. And so he went as near as he dared go. He knew he should disturb them in the nursery, and thought it best to leave Drum-

sticks entirely to his wife, this first evening. But he crept noiselessly to a recess in the hall, just outside the nursery door, where there was a couch and some cushions. He flung himself upon it, feeling less lonely than when below in the library. For he was nearer Charlotte.

As he passed the nursery door he saw the top of her brown head reflected in the toilet glass, as she swung to and fro in an old rocker which stood near a window, whose shades and curtains were pulled aside.

As he lay upon the couch he could hear the creaking of the chair. That Charlotte had his boy upon her breast, and that Drumsticks was encircled by one arm, he gathered from what was said by the speaker, and by an occasional low croon, with which he had heard Charlotte accentuate a kiss when given to their child. A lamp burned very dimly within the room.

"And I can ask Him anything—anything?" he heard Drumsticks say, presently.

"Anything," soberly replied Charlotte.

"And He'll do it—He'll give me what I ask?"

"Yes. Perhaps not exactly as a little girl would like. But in His own way he will."

"And He likes us to forgive bad people?"

"Yes."

The child considered. "I s'pose God knows we don't mean it when we pray for 'em. So He wouldn't pay any attention, anyway. And He will make anybody good if we ask Him?—and bless 'em?"

"That is what He likes us to ask when we pray." Charlotte was evidently charmed with the eagerness with which Drumsticks was absorbing spiritual truths.

"Who called Him God?" was the next question.

Charlotte hesitated. "Dear, there are so many things one cannot explain to a little bit of a girl!"

"But grown folks understand it all, do they? Do you?" asked the child, earnestly.

"I try to, but I am very, very ignorant."

Drumsticks thought a few moments so intently that her breathing seemed labored. Then she said aloud, as if to herself:

"I shall just ask Him to bless my Play-papa. I shan't ask Him to make him good. He's good enough, and so—even big folks are just like little children to this awful great Jesus! My! He must be big! Is He as big as this house?"

Charlotte waited for wisdom. "Dear, that is another one of the things we cannot understand. We are not told God's size—oh, dear—wait until you're older!"

"But He's big?"

"Yes."

"And my Play-papa—as big as he is—and all grown up—is just God's little boy?" demanded Drumsticks, excitedly.

God's little boy was miserably accepting a spiritual spanking at that moment. Oh, how far away from him the gentle group within the nursery seemed! How happy he would have been to have felt himself clean, pure in spirit, and to have been one with them! And what a bore

he would have thought such an hour before he had rendered himself an outcast from all such simple pleasure!

Charlotte arose to lay her boy in his cradle, leaning above him lovingly. He was warm, his pink face covered with tiny drops of moisture, and his cheeks crimped with the imprint of the embroidery upon the waist of her gown. Drumsticks followed her upon the tips of her toes, breathless, eagerly drinking in all the strange newness of the scene, enchanted with this her first dwelling in motherland.

The two stood in a hushed silence for a moment, and for that space of time the woman's face lost its impress of bravely borne new pain.

He was her man. He had never been false to her. Her child—years would only make it more true. There is only one woman in the life of each man whom he may never forget. He may marry and bury a serial of wives, but in all the days of the years of his life there will be for him but one mother. And there is no

title to be won of woman as satisfying as that of the Mother of Men. So Charlotte's thoughts ran.

Returning to her rocker, Charlotte moved it a little, that it might command a better view of the night, with its cold stars, and then wrapped the white-gowned figure of Drumsticks in her luxurious embrace. She had the arms and bosom which a child turns to, and nestles into, and, feeling quite safe, adores. Then she stooped and gathered her soft skirt about the child's naked feet, and covered her to the chin in its fold, and smiled above her like the angel she was.

And Poole knew what the two were about from the gentle rustling, the creaking of the rocker, and his knowledge of Charlotte.

"Now talk!" demanded Drumsticks, forgetting at last her gray blanket, and not measuring her bliss at all, but like a child accepting it naturally.

For children are philosophers, in that they make their own the lost art of exist-

ing, idly intoxicated with the mere tranquil sense of being.

And Charlotte talked, and Poole thought he had never heard her talk as well. But that was possibly because he found himself outside of it all. In his isolation he heard her try to explain to the child the change that had come to her life. There was to be—as it were—a new heaven and a new earth, and to Drumsticks it seemed mostly heaven. There was to be no Play-papa, it was true, but a kind Uncle Jack, who would love her more than ever. And there was to be an Aunt Charlotte, and, stranger than all, there was to be no Drumsticks, but a new little girl, with quite a new name, and who was to have nothing to do but play, be good, and love God. It was to be almost like Revelations, though Drumsticks had never heard of that.

She lay very still, her sensitive lips quivering, her eyes as bright as those of a bird. She tried to take it all in, and to understand what the pleasant voice was telling her. But she found it a bit difficult.

"And so I've no Play-papa—but just an Uncle Jack?"

"It is better so, dear."

"And he wasn't a *real* Play-papa?"

Charlotte hesitated before her answer. "No."

"And now he is a *real* Uncle Jack?"

Another pause. "He will be as good as one."

"I'd like something real," said the child's wistful voice. "And Sophie?" added the new little girl, after another pause.

"Forget her, dear, and don't talk of her—to any one!"

"All right. I will," was the answer. The child was much impressed by the mystery of it all. "And what is—what relation is my—Uncle Jack—to you?"

"He is—the papa of dear baby."

And Poole overhearing, accepted the position given him in the *ménage*. And then he held his breath, fearing the next question. It came—the one he had instinctively dreaded and endowed with awfulness.

"And what relation is my Uncle Jack to Sophie?"

A cold sweat was upon Poole, and he awaited the answer in a fury. It came without hesitation.

"He was—and is—no relation."

"And what is my new name?" asked the child, after another silence which had led Charlotte to hope her sleeping.

"I don't know, Drumsticks—only we must find something dear enough and pretty enough for our own little girl. Try and sleep."

# PART I.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### DURING WHICH THE CHILD IS HAPPY.

*"Et—Rose,—elle a vecu ce que vivent les roses,*
*L'espace d'un matin."*

THE following weeks of that autumn were the happiest of the child's life. And the love which she found with Poole and Charlotte was like a sunbeam which, stealing for an hour through the shutters, lights the melancholy of a darkened room.

She grew rosy, expanding like a young plant taken from the cellar into the open. The expression of her face changed. For the first time in her life she knew that simple, healthy existence of which the town-bred child is ignorant. For the first time she was subjected to that nursery routine so conventional, so sensible, and so morally wholesome for the young human animal. Her small body was clothed in simplest attire of warm wool, with fine aprons overlaying it whitely.

These took the place of those over ornate and conspicuous frocks with which Sophie had been pleased to robe her.

Her early supper in the nursery, with the crowing baby and the gentle Charlotte for companions, waited upon by the deft Clara, was a delight. The two children became very fond of each other, and little Poole turned to her each morning as soon as sleep left him. Each night Charlotte had much to tell her husband of Drumsticks' new grace and fancy. It was a safe subject, and there was much to avoid in conversation. Poole was trying hard to wait patiently, hoping that at least a part of the heart he had lost might some time be returned to him. And he was very miserable all of these never-to-be-forgotten days. About the raised eyebrows of it, and the gossip of it, he gave himself little concern. A rich man can afford a sin now and then.

What is a sin worth?

Surely not the price paid for it.

Poole was far more miserable than Charlotte. To her—pure, frank, sensible

Charlotte—there seemed but one course open, since she had elected to live out her life with him—that of making the best of it all.

Lacking in imagination, she was spared much anguish, as she failed to picture the scenes which jealousy would have suggested. Less a woman than an angel, she was not of a type to undergo that crucifixion of the heart which would have bowed some women to the earth. Charlotte did not understand. That woman is happiest who understands men least. But the measure of sorrow which had come to her left her a richness of charm which she had not before owned. Not realizing this, Poole wondered continually how he had failed to perceive that she possessed it. Grief is a passion, and any passion ripens. There are natures which are only brought to fruition through transports of tears. Those delicate flowers of trust, affection, and sympathy which bloom to perfection in such a nature as that of Charlotte had seemed but commonplace until the white moonlight

of mysterious charm had mantled them. And when that happened they were lost to Poole. The man or woman who, possessing them, risks such a loss, through the yielding to ephemeral desire, deserves the banishment from Eden which may follow. The love of Charlotte might have been a Garden Delight to one who could have forgotten, amid its lilies, the vivid temptings of other blossoms growing outside the lawful enclosure.

Poole had strayed after the forbidden. And now he found himself locked outside the Garden, clinging to the palings like a bad small boy, and curiously watching the goings-on within, where Drumsticks had been admitted to play among the lilies. He had been a hog, and was now in a position to dispute with Thoreau the entailed right to satisfaction attributed to that animal. He had wallowed, and found himself neither satisfied nor a philosopher. Ah—if he had but been a little better man—or—a little worse!

Meanwhile Drumsticks was happy. She was happy as only children are happy.

She asked no questions. Her lot had been cast into her lap, and it was a fine one, and she was very busy with it. Her new name had not as yet been decided upon, although it was much discussed.

Poole wished to call the child Pamela, after a little playmate of his who had died when he was away at school for the first time. She had gone away leaving a memory like the odor of new-mown hay in his boyish life. And at times throughout his manhood it had delicately obtruded itself in a vague way, always subtly suggesting things clean, and the early hours of a dewy morning in spring. And the name pleased Charlotte very well.

But Mrs. Applegate's indifference to the child's advent suddenly developed into a vital interest whenever the subject of the new name was approached. Her zeal was never understood by Poole, nor did he ever know what ideas she entertained as to the presence of the child in the family. All that had passed upon the subject had been conducted behind closed doors by Charlotte. Drumsticks had

been accepted by the old lady and endured, and even made much of. For Drumsticks "had a way with her," as even the cook owned. Any one who ever knew the child will find a pleasure in recalling it.

But in the matter of the new name Mrs. Applegate stood firm. It must be religious—the more religious the better—as a sort of offset to the one the child had so far owned. The name of Drumsticks was worse than mythology, and Mrs. Applegate considered mythology very bad indeed. The gentle tides of days must be allowed to rise and ebb before it would be possible to divorce her from her choice of Hannah, a name which she considered unpretending and at the same time most respectable. Charlotte evaded an immediate decision in the matter, knowing by experience that she should gain a point by doing so. And the child herself was so happy it really appeared to matter very little whether she had any name at all.

Her startling and ingenuous acceptance of Scripture was surprising, and occasionally disconcerting.

It afforded Mrs. Applegate continual consternation. One morning she discovered Drumsticks kneeling in the barnyard, with arms outstretched to fluttering pigeons above her head, and a most piously exalted expression upon her small, round face.

"What *are* you doing, child? Get up instantly! You are quite daubed with filth!" exclaimed the old lady, indignantly.

"I'm playing I'm the Virgin Mary! Don't you see the angel?" piped the child's healthy treble, and Mrs. Applegate was overcome, and retreated gasping and wordless.

The imaginative faculty was enormously developed in the child, enabling her faith in Charlotte to cause in her mind a most literal acceptance of the mighty religious statements of nursery talks. And her questions would have staggered better theology than that of the gentle Charlotte.

Among other characteristics of Drumsticks which never failed to puzzle and scandalize Mrs. Applegate, was the love

she entertained for the old gray blanket. She regarded it as foolish in the extreme, and even a setting up of an idol, as it were. This was especially true when she discovered that the child talked to it as if it were a live thing. And when she insisted upon rewarding the blanket for fictitious virtues, and upon punishing it for alleged lapses, Mrs. Applegate drew the line.

Happening to enter the nursery upon the occasion of a bath hour, she found the baby redolent of violet powder, and with his damp, gold curls fresh from Charlotte's fingers.

To this royal highness came his handmaid, Drumsticks, scantily arrayed and dragging the gray blanket. With stern persistence she impressed upon the interested infant that Miss Gray Blanket was bad—very bad indeed.

"Baby whip!—so! Bad—bad—*bad!*"

And Poole, the younger, ever ready, as humans are, to punish, did most solemnly spat with his fat, pink palms upon the blanket which Drumsticks held before him.

"Why do you teach baby thus, child?" questioned the old lady, with stiff lips.

"I *must!* She was *so* naughty!" Here Drumsticks shook the blanket indignantly.

"*Naughty!* A blanket—*naughty!* Come! come! This is too much! How *very* silly for a little girl of seven!"

"But you don't know!"

"*What* is it I don't know?"

(Many things, possibly, Mrs. Applegate!)

"Why," replied Drumsticks, sinking her voice to a whisper, "she [the blanket] said she didn't love Jesus!"

Mrs. Applegate stared hard at the child. It was a high-bred stare of which she was pardonably vain. She opened her mouth, which was inclined to be abysmal, by the way, and then closed it, her bookish nose drooping over it once more in a resigned fashion.

That afternoon, however, she offered a protest to Charlotte.

"Why do you teach the child so—er—literally from the Bible?"

"Because I believe—literally."

"All of it?"

"Yes, mother! It seems to me that one must accept it so—as a little child—or—not at all."

"What a child you are yourself, Charley!" Mrs. Applegate's tone became mildly tolerant.

"Am I?"

"But—*literally*—one can struggle!—but— That—first chapter of Matthew! Why—er—" Mrs. Applegate had never been in touch with Matthew.

She bulged mentally as one who had in her own opinion flouted that disciple. "But I *hope*," she added, virtuously, "that I believe all that is *necessary!*"

"I don't know, mother," said Charlotte, simply, not as a reply to the possible inquiry in Mrs. Applegate's foregoing remark, but thoughtfully, as one whose wistful eyes search a spiritual horizon. "I don't know. I *must* believe it *all!* I must believe it to *live!*" There was a sob caught in Charlotte's white throat.

"Humph! This Quixotic adoption of

this unearthly child is only a beginning!" And Mrs. Applegate was fain to groan aloud.

But Drumsticks knew nothing of such talk. She was living her dreams. And the star, and the dear Jesus, who loved her so much that He would grant her every wish, continued to be as real to her as the arms of Charlotte.

And oh, the enchanted hours in the garden!

There was an old tree, with a clematis vine about it, and with a crook in its trunk which made a fine seat, quite as if a fairy had ordered it to be so. Some of the flowers were gone, it was true, but in each seed clinging to its pod there was left a promise to a little dreamer like Drumsticks. And there were still many blossoms hanging upon the stalks of the carnations, and nasturtiums along with chrysanthemums wooed by dull old bees; and there was a spider — but why dwell upon it?

Oh, the dreams the child found there! and the dreams she left there for all to

dream who should come after her! A dream of a small, serious child, with intent, earnest eyes, a sweet mouth, and with a certain grace of childish ease in movement which was all her own. The little figure seems still to flit about those garden paths upon certain golden autumn days when all is very still.

And then, best of all, a ringing, just at dusk, of the bell, calling to supper in the nursery, where a delicious feeling of cosey well-being and of shut-in-ness was imparted when the shades were lowered.

Ting-a-ling! Ting-a-ling! No! there was no more cheery sound than that!

And when Poole, coming from town some hours later, stole up the stairs to make his dinner toilette, it was frequently to hear the drowsy murmur of a happy child's voice:

> "Now I lay me down to sleep;
> I pray the Lord my soul to keep."

# PART I.

## CHAPTER IX.

### DEALING WITH THE SINNER, THE CHILD, AND A LITTLE SHIP.

"*Madame, as you pass us by,*
*Dreaming of your loves and wines,*
*Do not brush your rich brocade*
*Against this little maid of mine,*
*Madame, as you pass us by!*"

ONE evening Poole, returning to Seascrest by an early train, insinuated himself, with a fine art, into the nursery at bedtime.

Keeping one eye well upon Charlotte, he dandled his astonished son upon his knee, according attentions never rendered before. It must be remembered that Poole had always disliked babies, and as a young father had never experienced the glow of pride said to be the property of paternity. Charlotte went quietly about, folding and arranging the children's clothing, and consulting in a low voice with Clara the details of a nightly nursery toilette. She was surprised at Poole's caring to be with them,

and a little amused. But Charlotte never wondered at anything long. She undressed Drumsticks before she came for the baby. When she took him from his father their hands touched, and the contact was unnoticed by her, although since the night upon which he had made his wild confession she had never been as near to him.

With Poole it was not so.

Her touch was so tenderly feminine, so full of the gift of herself, that he longed to fall at her feet in most abject humility and beg that she lay her hands upon his head, that the fever of his brain might leave him.

But he only said: "Go to mamma, youngster!" with a half-embarrassed dab of a kiss, which fell wide of its mark.

He watched them for a moment, but Drumsticks, jealous, stole within the circle of his arm. *She* loved him, and—believed in him. That was written in her delightful eyes. He drew her to a chair by the window, and took her upon his lap, and they looked out into the twilight together, as they had done so often in town.

He thought of those days and wondered if she was thinking of them also, and almost feared that she was, and would speak of them. The memory of the trees in the little city park which they had named, and which had been companions to the child, brought other memories which he had hoped would soon die—to her—and himself. Darkness was gathering, and the colors of the garden just beneath the window were fast blending, but far out in the dusky purple distance the tossing ocean gave out a horizon line against a sky with one star.

The child lay very still against his heart for a little, and Poole derived a certain comfort from her presence. Charlotte and his own boy were removed from him by his own acts. But here was one—a Columbine's baby—who loved him, and whose love had come to him through his sin, and her faith in him was the one redeeming feature of the whole affair.

Drumsticks did not understand. And never would understand. But her love soothed him by the flattery of its intuition.

Only the love of a little child, or of a dog, can comfort thus.

"Do you like apple marmalade, Uncle Jack?"

"Awfully!" He was relieved to find her thoughts dwelling upon the near past of the nursery supper table, and not with one more remote. A happy child has little thought of anything but the present.

"And did you used to love it when you were a little boy?"

"Better than anything except cakes and honey."

"Did you spread it on bread?"

"No, I was a bad boy, Drumsticks—I wanted *all* jam."

"Did you?" The child was interested, and reflected before she added: "*We* have it spread on biscuit. But—*you*—never, never *could* be *bad*, Uncle Jack!"

Poole did not care to discuss this, and they were again silent. As the twilight deepened, the blues and greens blurred into the gray of the distance, but the star shone with added brilliance. It was watched nightly by Drumsticks, as Poole

knew, but for the first time they watched it together. Suddenly a feather of white flickered out upon the tossing waves of the sea.

"The sail!" cried Drumsticks, enchanted, sitting bolt upright.

And then she explained to Poole that every night a little boat had started for the star, and had sailed away ever so far, but had never seemed to reach it yet. He pretended a vast interest in the attempt, and once more they carried on their fanciful talk very much as upon those other evenings when they had sat at the window of a dreary fourth floor front room. And it was Charlotte's turn to listen as she sat and rocked Poole the younger in her arms.

"The little white ship is sailing, sailing—"

"And by-and-by—"

"It will reach the kind white star," murmured Drumsticks, sleepily finishing the sentence.

Finally, when twilight melted the horizon line completely, and sea and sky

seemed to mingle, she suddenly declared that it was accomplished. The ship had at length reached the star.

"For I *saw* it!" cried Drumsticks, joyfully, and half asleep.

In after years Poole was often to recall this evening. And when he did so, it was to think with pain which was not all bitter of the troubled sea of his passion, over which had danced such a brave little craft, always steering for the light, and reaching it only at that hour when horizons are lost and earth melts away into heaven.

# PART II.

## CHAPTER I.

### IN WHICH THE CHILD MAKES A PRAYER.

*"They say that God lives very high!*
*But if you look above the pines*
*You cannot see our God. And why?*

*God is so good, He wears a fold*
*Of heaven and earth across his face,*
*Like secrets kept, for love, untold."*

For six weeks Fate wove peaceful, happy days into the fabric of which she was fashioning Drumsticks' life. After that her inexorable fingers insisted upon something by way of contrast. Those who now remember those six weeks attribute to them an almost tearful beauty. Is it not the early death of the rose which gives to it a subtle charm? Fate dotes upon elfin arabesques, and upon smooth backgrounds of white days she loves to hurl grotesque blots, spectral traceries of despair and vice. And she has a devilish art in it all.

The day following Poole's advent into

the nursery, Mrs. Twombly-Applegate was sitting in a corner of the library which was a spot dear to her because of its window. There, when there was sunlight, she found it; and when there was none, as upon this day in the middle of November, it still possessed advantages.

She had just laid aside the morning paper, when she distinctly heard the crunching of wheels upon the gravelled drive. She peered between the ruffled muslin curtains, being rewarded by the vision of a very elegant female, who stepped languidly from the shabby village wagon, which, it was easy to surmise, had brought her from the station. She was in travelling dress, and the light of day failed to discover a flaw in her perfect beauty. Mrs. Applegate sat on calmly in her corner, quietly turning over in her mind the names of various beauties of whom she had heard. Then she found time to wonder if the parlor maid was out, or perhaps dead, for, although the bell was persistently touched by an exquisite hand, the electric current seemed flatly refusing to

do its work. After assimilating the fact that things were not connecting in their usual decorous and orderly manner, Mrs. Applegate resolved to herself open the door.

Accordingly, she acted upon her resolution with much dignity, and herself ushered Sophie—for it was Sophie—into the tiny reception room. It struck Mrs. Applegate that her visitor seemed to take it for granted that she was already known. Puzzled and pondering, she procured the belated maid, sending her to call Charlotte, for whom the stranger asked, giving no name. Mrs. Applegate's interest was stimulated by the impression of mystery which hung about the call, even as did a faint suggestion of Chypre exhale from the fair unknown's attire. Charlotte came immediately, and, not recognizing a voice which she had heard but once before in the modulated murmur in which it commented upon the weather in response to Mrs. Applegate's sprightly originality upon that subject, she was well within the room before she grasped the situation.

Then, in the twinkling of an eye, she accepted what was to follow, and such a pitiful shock of grief smote her with the knowledge as to turn her face as clear a white as the gown she wore. The two women looked at each other steadily, each considering intently. And Mrs. Applegate was moved with a deep curiosity.

Sophie was blooming with the fulness of her magical beauty, and Charlotte's sickening heart fell with the sight, in a helpless, weary, first realization of the might of it. There again was that peerless face with the ripe lips, whose inimitable smiles were tucked so redly into their corners—that face—those lips—which she had hoped never to see again!

And Sophie's eyes, with their power of asking, answering, laughing, weeping, dreaming, as no other eyes might do!

And Charlotte! what had she? She asked it of herself. Nothing—but a pure white life—a white heart incapable of guile, a white soul gentle as heaven, and at the present moment a very white face also.

There was so much of tragedy in that face, that even her mother was aghast at the sight, and never thought of neglected introductions.

And Sophie?

Sophie was flattered, and amused, immediately achieving the greatest bit of acting of her life.

"My child!" she stammered, going first red, and then pale.

Mrs. Applegate nearly fell out of her chair.

Sophie was thinking: "I believe the poor fool thinks I've come after *him!*"

The fact of the matter was that Sophie was where she was because of an idle hour, a bump of curiosity, and a spice of malice. Poole had piqued her by the absoluteness with which he had dropped out of her life. And she had conceived the idea that a mother's longing to see once more the child she had renounced from most unselfish motives would be considered a fitting and proper explanation for a visit which would at the same time recall her to his mind. He would be com-

pelled to think of her. Why should she wish him to do so? Let him who understands her class decide. And she felt that she could not enter his thoughts without stirring them. And when a man's thoughts are stirred by such a woman—what then? She did not want him back again. No. But she refused to be forgotten.

So—she had stammered very prettily—"My child!"

"This visit was not anticipated," said Charlotte, wondering if it were not all a bad—a very bad—dream. She came forward a step or so, clasping her hands laxly in front of her, and seeming to ignore a chair which stood at her side. Sophie noted the fact that the wife declined to sit in her presence.

It was a small peg to hang life and death upon, yet, perhaps if Charlotte had seemed less icily superior all might have been different. But it was as it was, and the consequences have worked themselves out.

"I—want to see her—Drumsticks. I—my—is it so strange?"

"Very natural, I'm sure!" murmured Mrs. Applegate, feebly resolving to be mistress of the occasion. The might of the encounter—woman to woman—she felt dimly, but the extreme beauty of the person who was evidently the mysterious mother of the alien Drumsticks staggered all of her previous conceptions of her personality.

*This* the mother of a child who had no other name than that of Drumsticks? This! This youthful, magnificent creature! Where, then, was the poverty which alone should have parted them? She recognized that she—Mrs. Twombly-Applegate—had been insulted by being kept in the dark. And from the moment of that recognition she ranged herself in line with Sophie. So great is feminine spite.

"Drumsticks! You want to see *her?*" faltered Charlotte.

"I repeat—is it strange?" Sophie's voice became mournfully musical.

At this moment Life cracked a dangerous joke. Drumsticks ran into the room.

We all know that those dramatic inci-

dents which in a play are most criticised as unreal are exactly those which in life most often occur. The happenings in this small tale are exaggerated? They are forced? Unnatural? Very well. You are mistaken. For the story of Drumsticks is a true one.

And so the child—exactly as if it were all in a play—ran into the room at the critical moment.

Seeing before her Sophie, she stopped short, and, without a word, turned troubled, brilliant eyes full upon Charlotte, like those of a small deer led by cruel lights, and asking dumbly of the hunter the reason of its death pang.

"Come to me, Drumsticks!" said Charlotte, moved to extremest pity by the sight of those eyes.

"Come to me, Drumsticks!" called Sophie, winningly, to the child, in quite the same breath.

Then was the fact that things go easily wrong emphasized. For Drumsticks ignored her mother, and ran straight into the open arms of Charlotte, kicking away

a rug in the trip, shocking the sensibilities of Mrs. Applegate, enraging Sophie, and hastening her fate with running feet.

A savage flame leaped into the pupils of Sophie's lovely orbs. At that second, born of an animal jealousy, came the resolve to claim the child again. Why not ? There had been nothing legal about the adoption of Drumsticks. Poole had dreaded the publicity, the ripple of comment, which would have followed making it such, and had trusted to the relief he knew Sophie experienced in ridding herself of a charge which had ever been unwelcome. But he had not calculated upon the shifting tides of a woman's whim—

> "As the sunned bosom of a humming bird
> At each pant lifts some fiery hue—
> Fierce gold, bewildering green, or blue ;
> The same, yet ever new."

The complexity of wheels within wheels is as nothing to the purposes set in motion when the wife and the other woman meet.

And from the moment when these two met thus the child's fate was as a straw borne about upon rushing currents of feminine emotion.

As for Sophie, she arose, exclaiming, after the fashion of a female David : "My child ! My child !" And she fell upon the gentle Charlotte, and the terrified Drumsticks, tearing her child from those other more tender arms, straining her to a maternal embrace which held more elements within it of jealous anger than of maternity.

And Mrs. Applegate, looking on, sympathized with Sophie.

"A mother's rights are sacred," she breathed out.

Sophie was weeping hysterical tears, while more quiet drops were rolling over Charlotte's pale cheeks. But Drumsticks never cried ; only looked from the enclosure of her mother's arms like a bird in a snare, and besought dumbly, though with struggles which but hastened the now inevitable end, that Charlotte take her to her heart once more. But that

tender and pure refuge was lost to Drumsticks.

"I had not bargained that you should prejudice my child against me!" wept Sophie.

And Charlotte, shaking like a leaf, could find no words, and so said nothing. What could she say?

"And I shall take her home with me again — immediately — immediately — do you hear?" There was outraged motherhood in every tone. Mrs. Applegate left the room hastily.

"Will you not wait—until—" Charlotte faltered, with white lips, unable to finish.

"Until *he* comes?" finished the other, with flaming eyes. "What under heaven could *he* do about it? If I am determined to take her away, how could he prevent it? It was only an experiment anyway! I thought I would try and live without her! But I cannot! One would think I was dragging her off to a prison!" Then, directing the torrent of her remarks to the child, she added: "Drumsticks, darling!

have you forgotten your own, own Sophie?"

Drumsticks, darling, had not forgotten. If she had it might have been easier. Suddenly a strange thing happened. Drumsticks spoke for the first time, enunciating each word distinctly, yet in a low voice:

"Please, God, make Sophie go away!"

Then she waited. There was a silence as of death in the room, and in that silence something died. It was the simple faith of a little child. For the stillness in which she waited the answer to her prayer was broken by the reappearance of Mrs. Applegate. In her hands she bore the ermine-lined coat and white-feathered hat which Drumsticks had worn when she came to them.

"As a mother—I shall defend a mother—against the well-meant but ill-judged interference of my own child. It has been a mistake from first to last! All a mistake! It goes against nature's law to attempt the separation of a mother and child. I never liked it! But I was not

listened to! And now you see!" Here Mrs. Applegate turned upon the cowering Charlotte with noble indignation. "It has been too silly! And the only thing you can do is to let her go—after spoiling her—yes—spoiling her! That ridiculous prayer! I never heard of such a thing! I believe the child expected an immediate answer! As if God had nothing better to do!"

Drumsticks was eying her hat and coat.

"There isn't any God," said Drumsticks, reflectively, "any more'n a Santa Claus. It's all lies! If there was any God, He'd take better care of little girls—like me. An' He'd kill you," she added, frankly, gazing feverishly at Mrs. Applegate.

"You see!" ejaculated that individual, as if her foregoing remarks had been proven by this last utterance of the child, and tumbling, an indignant heap, into the nearest chair.

Charlotte fell upon her knees by Drumsticks' side, trying to help her, with

trembling hands, in the effort to button her coat and adjust the feathered hat. But the child would have none of her help, proudly persisting in her attempt to accomplish all without assistance, although Charlotte clung to her so that at length her arms were about her and her wet cheek against the small, stern, set face.

"Dear, dear Drumsticks, God *will* take care of you!" she whispered. "Believe it, oh, believe it! You are His little girl, wherever you may be; and He does love you!"

Drumsticks was silent.

"Sweetheart, you believe your Aunt Charlotte, don't you?"

"You aren't my Aunt Charlotte at all! Nothin' is *true!* Everything's lies."

For a moment the two white faces, woman and child, looked straight into each other's eyes. Charlotte looked away first.

"Don't you want to say good-bye to baby?" Mrs. Applegate asked, not unkindly.

"No!" cried the child. But, for the first time, her lips quivered.

Then, in the face of as golden a sun as ever gilded the roofs of happy homes, the child of a Columbine and a Pierrot was taken away into the shadows of her mother's past. Before she left, she did consent to kiss Charlotte, and kissed her quite as firmly as a child was ever known to kiss a beloved one whom she was leaving forever. Of the two characters, hers was the stronger. What a woman she would have made!

"One must think of the servants! Come! Come!" said Mrs. Applegate, briskly shaking Charlotte by the shoulder, to recall her to the proprieties, after Sophie had driven away with the child. And she was right. One must always think of the servants. And so, finally, Mrs. Applegate had it all her own way.

"Oh, what will Jack say?" cried Charlotte between sobs. "Will he blame me?"

"I should think not, indeed!" remarked her mother, and there was a wicked sparkle in that estimable woman's eye which hinted of suspicion grown banyan-like in an hour.

# PART II.

## CHAPTER II.

### IN WHICH THE GOOD WOMAN LEARNS TO LIE.

*"Pure, so pure! and me bemoiled*
*Loathly as loathed vermin, just*
*As weak souls are left of lust*
*Loveless, low, and soiled."*

THAT night Poole stood, wretched man, and heard how another chapter had been added to the story. Charlotte managed to give details quite as they occurred, and that Mrs. Applegate interpolated glances, pregnant, and near their confinement, with meaning, had not escaped him.

His first impulse had been to return to town, and, seeing Sophie, to have endeavored a course of reasoning. But Mrs. Applegate's eye had fixed, as with a lance, such a thought of action on his part. Her eye evidently expected that such would be his first suggestion, and what her eye expected her tongue was ready for. If Poole had been able to see Charlotte in private, it might have re-

sulted in his following this course, but hours of privacy with his wife were as if they never had been. And certain it is that, with the memory of Sophie's wonderful beauty fresh upon her, she would have hesitated to subject her erring one again to its influences, although she might have done so—God knows—with utter safety.

The nursery was not quiet that night. The baby missed Drumsticks and fretted for her. And so also did the man who walked the garden paths, with his cigar for company, hoping that Charlotte would come to him there in the crisp November night. But she did not.

This last chapter of the whole hateful affair had brought all the suffering of that first knowledge again to that gentle woman. Perhaps, also, a certain amount of imagination had been born within her from the mere force of Sophie's extraordinary charm. For Sophie had charm. She had not appeared as resistless upon the first and only other time when Charlotte had seen her. Upon this night of Drum-

sticks' absence, the pain of pity was obscured by the pangs of jealousy. That horrid other woman! Why, oh, why should she have been gifted with such diabolic beauty? And Charlotte, in her splendid and silent strength to suffer and be silent, at length broke down. Would the other woman steal him once more? Was not that perhaps Sophie's object in taking the child away? It appeared that there was very little to be said upon the matter between John Adzit Poole and she that was his lawful wife, after the first brief account of the taking away of Drumsticks. They seemed to scan each other's faces from either side of a gulf. When the child went, she left a silence. And there was nothing to do about it now, except to live right on and let the days make uneventful history.

And the only one who was happy wrote her name Applegate. And as her happiness consisted in the luxury of intact virtue—from her own point of view—that was to be expected. The baby went on persisting in fretting after Drumsticks.

Clara looked curious and sorrowful in a mild way. Charlotte was full of a bad dream that she might have opposed Sophie more vigorously, and perhaps more successfully. As for Poole, it would be difficult, indeed, to characterize his discontent with all things—beginning with himself.

And so the days and weeks went by, and seemed to halt and limp, yet the story was even then leaping to its finish.

One evening, after the days had carried the affair into December, a wire came for Poole, just at the dinner hour. The bit of paper was brought to him as the three were seated at table. He laid his oyster fork aside, his napkin over one knee, and turned his chair to get the light of the candles. Then, without a comment, he read and re-read the few words. Charlotte saw the tremble of his hand, and the appeal in his eyes. Charlotte's intuitions had become sharpened. With a glance at Mrs. Applegate, who was devoting an absorbed attention to her plate, she arose and left the table. Poole followed her upstairs into the room which

had once been theirs, but of late, Charlotte's. Once within the room, she turned, clasping her hands, as if in an agony of doubt and anxiety.

"You have been sent for?"

"Yes."

"And you will go?" Could Charlotte threaten?

"Read."

This is what Charlotte read:

*"The child is dying, and asks for you. Can you come to-night? S. S."*

She looked from the telegram to the man before her. His eyes were staring out of the window into the chill of a December night, which had frosted the pane. There was a brilliant moon, and all the leafless shrubs of the garden seemed magnified, as with a lens. Perhaps a tear did it.

Charlotte walked straight to Poole, pointing with one finger to the yellow slip of paper.

"Do you believe this thing—to be true?"

He seemed surprised. "I see no reason to doubt it. Surely—"

"Surely? *Surely?* Of what are we sure? What did Drumsticks say? '*Everything* is a lie.' And I have heard the words ever since!" Charlotte's tones were low—as low as one's breath, and as wildly passionate as if her name were not Charlotte. "Look at me! Look at me, John Poole! Look in my eyes! Do you love this woman still? Are you yearning for her beauty? God knows—I do not wonder!—when—when—I look at myself!"

Poole remained silent and aghast before this—the new Charlotte. She walked the room, and as she did so she threw her arms over her head in an agony of shame at her loss of control. If she had been less self-controlled, she might from the first have been more human. And if in those other days which had gone before she had been more human, she might have understood her husband better. And he might have been better able to resist the very human sweetness tucked into the corners of Sophie's charmed lips.

But Charlotte was human now.

And in that moment—a moment of

great perplexity and misery—Poole felt a hope born that some day—it might be years from that—she would give her dear, warm, now human self to him, and that if they could but forget, they might be happy.

But the time for forgetting was not yet. To-night—there was Drumsticks.

Suddenly Charlotte's mood broke into a shower of tears.

"Do you know what I feel?" she asked, piteously. "Oh, God! Jack! The shame of it! It is jealousy! I saw for the first time the other day how—how *desirable*—she was! And for the first time the knowledge crept into my mind of how you must—you must—"

Poole seized her by the shoulders, alert and resolute.

"Listen!" said he, "Charlotte—I will not go one step if you do not wish me to go! I will not go even to Drumsticks! But listen—I believe it is as she says—I believe that something has happened to the child. I do not believe this to be a *ruse*, as you seem to suspect—nor will you when you come to yourself. You will see

then—that—if—that woman—had wanted to see me—which she does not—why should she ?—she would have sent a message to me in town.

"And she has not done so. I have not seen her—nor have I tried to do so. And she has not tried to see me ! And of her fatal beauty of which you make so much to-night—it is of no value to me ! My heart is full of you ! Oh, believe me, Charlotte ! I am unlike other men in this — that there has been but two women in my life ! One I loved—still love—and always shall love ! That woman is yourself ! Don't you *know* this ? The other—she—it is hard to explain—but you were so—much an angel ! And I was so much a man—beast, if you prefer it ! And—but—I never *loved* her ! Never ! Never ! Never ! "

Doubts will always return to a heart they have once frequented—it is their birthright. And doubts would return to Charlotte's fond heart, but at that moment they fled in an unruly body, totally routed by the earnestness with which Poole flung his little say at her. It was

not an original speech. Many men have used the same words before, and if not the same words, the same meaning. And as each has thought himself alone in the joy of his sin, so each has fancied himself alone in the honest misery of his repentance.

Where is the man who has not repented?

There is a felicity of confession, and of absolution, and Poole began to see that the latter would some day be his at the fair, innocent hands of his sweet Charlotte. But expiation belonged to him now.

"And—as if your soul were naked—do you swear—that you go only to the child? Are you not influenced by thoughts of *her*—oh—oh!"—and Charlotte fell weeping once more, only suddenly to desist, demanding firmly:

"How would you like it? Tell me—how would you like it? Try—just try—and put yourself in my place!"

But this adoption of the woman's point of view is a thing no man has ever been able to make.

Suddenly Charlotte sprang at him.

"What are you sitting there for, Jack?" she asked with inconsistency. He had settled once more into an attitude of deep dejection upon the side of the bed. "Why don't you hurry? What if Drumsticks—oh, it cannot be! God would not let her die with that rebel heart! Hurry! Hurry! Go to her! Oh, I wish I could—"

And then she rushed for his travelling bag, and herself helped him tumble a few necessities into its depths. He consulted his watch, lifting his eyebrows to look from beneath his eyelids after the fashion of an inebriate. Knowledge was coming to Poole—knowledge of his Charlotte—and he was a bit drunk with the whirl of it.

"And you are willing I should go?" he asked at last, standing on the porch waiting for the trap which was to carry him to the station in time to catch the 8:15 train to town.

"There could be no choice! I am willing—and I am not willing!"

Charlotte was thinking again of the beautiful mouth—that mocking mouth—and exaggerating to herself, as a jealous

woman will, its power over the man she loved.

"Good-bye!" he said solemnly, and his eyes glistened in the moonlight as he looked her full in the face.

"You will wire?"

"Either wire or come."

"And you will come back to me?"

"Can you doubt it, my wife?"

And then for the first time in all these many weeks Poole kissed his dear Charlotte.

Wheels jarred into the duet, and he was away—gone once more to the other woman.

Not yet—not even yet—did a surge of anxious tenderness for that Drumsticks who was dying overflow Charlotte's heart. It was all a great whirl of maddest jealousy. That woman—oh, that woman!

And the moon, with grim self-immolation, spitted herself at the moment upon a distant village spire, and there she stuck, until Charlotte, red of eye and white of face, went in and shut the door. And shutting it, shut out all the world except her boy, and Mrs. Applegate, whom she met in the hall.

"Would it be proper for me to ask what all this means? These tears! John gone to town without his dinner! What can have called him away in such a hurry?"

There was an icy incredulity in the manner with which Mrs. Applegate accepted Charlotte's rather vague explanations.

"You mean to tell me?"

"Please don't—meddle!"

"Charlotte! Is this my daughter?"

"I'm afraid it is."

"You needn't tell me! I *know* it has something to do with that woman—and that extraordinary child!"

Mrs. Applegate followed Charlotte, whose flying feet were carrying her to the nursery. As she went she hurled these astonishing statements over her shoulder at her mother:

"It has nothing whatever to do with either! I saw the despatch. It was a purely business matter."

The knowledge that she was now a liar seemed to afford Charlotte a strange satisfaction. She felt herself to be more like other people. With a half-smile she

leaned above her boy in his cradle and whispered:

"You have a wicked, wicked mother."

Then, born of her own lie, for sinners must forgive to be logical, Charlotte felt her heart flooded with a divine mercy for that more virile sinner, the boy's father.

It was the wrong time for Mrs. Applegate to introduce the subject upon which she had been meditating for some time. But she did so.

"Charlotte," she began in a low voice, after watching Clara pass out of the nursery, and by casting a shadow upon an opposite wall of the hallway give evidence that she had passed down the stairway—"Charlotte, my poor child, I cannot tell you what strange suspicions lurk in my mind in regard to that woman—and that child."

"In regard to Jack's interest in them, you mean?"

"I dare not put it into words."

"Then you do mean that, mother?"

"You must have thought of it yourself! But you seem to lack—spirit!"

"Do I?"

"It would seem so. Have you—have you asked Jack if there has—"

"No."

"Not that he would tell you. Men are—"

"That will do!" cried Charlotte, fiercely.

"Remember I am your mother!" aghast, and rising hastily to her feet.

"You are. I cannot forget it. Listen! Jack *never saw*—never *even saw*—the mother of Drumsticks. It was through her—sister—er—that we met the child—and fancied her—and *loved* her—and—But," said Charlotte, suddenly changing her tone—"but if she had been his *mistress*—if—if—Drumsticks had been his own child—if he had cruelly deceived me in the matter—I should forgive him all—so there!"

All of which goes to prove that Charlotte was not strong-minded—God bless her.

"Well! I never! I never, never heard anything like that! My own child, too!" ejaculated Mrs. Applegate, backing out of

the room. Mrs. Applegate was in some ways quite wonderful, but after all, the most wonderful thing of all was that she should be the mother of Charlotte.

"And," pursued Charlotte, superbly, "if it were true, which it *isn't*, I hope I should be big enough and sensible enough to remember that men are altogether different from women—and have more temptations—and—and *ought* to be forgiven."

Here she shut the nursery door upon that more advanced woman, Mrs. Applegate. Then she went and cried her heart out over the child of an erring father, and cooed to him, and moaned out these contradictory sentiments:

"He'll never, never be true to your poor hideous mother, dearie! And she—oh! oh! so beautiful" (sobs), "and such lips!"

And that night Charlotte slept in the nursery, when she did sleep, which was not long at a time. And a gale sprang up in the night, and the Four Winds blew greatly, while the little house rocked

like a cradle. Charlotte lay with her child safe upon the haven of her breast, and thought a little on the poor lives which were being swallowed by the hungry waves at sea, and much upon the fact that, on a wild night like this, it would seem easy for a dear man like her Jack to lose his soul. And especially easy would it be if the devil to whom he should lose it had red, red lips, with wonderful meanings tucked into their corners. Especially, again, would he be in danger if he should happen to have a very plain, ordinary, simple, ignorant wife at home, like—herself.

# PART II.

## CHAPTER III.

### IN WHICH THE WOMAN THINKS ALOUD A LITTLE.

*"A woman sitting in a silent room*
*Full of white flowers that moved and made no sound."*

So Charlotte found herself alone the following day—alone with her thoughts, which were, indeed, like white flowers, as they were chiefly of a sweet child. Dead birds, who had been the sport of the last night's storm, were not more broken of limb than was Charlotte in spirit when daybreak found her. With the first light she arose, leaving her boy asleep, with crumpled fists close-pressed beneath his plump chin. She wandered about the quiet house, still now, after the noises of the night. Finally, she went to Poole's room, and, wrapping herself in his wool bath robe, threw open the east window and looked out at the new day to which earth was giving birth. Flats of marsh land were bristling with pink rushes, gleaming swart yet glowing out of the

early gray morning. The huge sails of windmills which had so hoarsely croaked throughout the night were hushed, for the winds had died away. The sounds of the dismal night had given place to the voices which hail the birth of each new day. All the earth seemed filled with a joyful promise of fresh life to be. Yes, it was so. The night was over; others would come, but not that one. And now it was day. Charlotte heard the servants creep about, stealthily preparing the comforts of the breakfast hour. And, amid the comforting sounds of normal, commonplace life, something seemed to say to Charlotte that all would yet be well. Did not day follow night? And ease, pain?

"Well, all will be well," thought Charlotte. And then—thought of Drumsticks.

For the first time, a keen realization of Drumsticks' danger struck her. With the daylight her own agony of jealousy seemed lessened. But, Drumsticks! That dear little one was dying—was perhaps already dead. And her soul—was it well with that soul?

Charlotte felt herself seized with emotions of pity, wonder, doubt, and then faith. What had she taught the child? That to ask was to receive. And Drumsticks had believed her. Charlotte had thought she herself believed what she taught. One night she had heard the child pray for another rose on the bush under the dining-room window. And she had felt a guilty responsibility and a decided lack of faith, it being then November. And when before breakfast the next morning Drumsticks had calmly announced that she wanted to run out-of-doors for a moment, "just to pick a rose she had asked God for," Charlotte had suffered from theological scare.

And when Drumsticks, no whit amazed, had entered the room with the rose, a sickly wonder of a Long Island autumn, she had not laid the rose to Providence. but to an astounding climate. She had drawn a long breath of relief, and had followed it by a smile, with a tear in her eye, for the child's simplicity of faith.

Of this teaching is the mill which will

grind out cynics. The most of us who have rubbed elbows with experience have come to believe in spiritual blessings, accorded by a spiritual Father to a something which partakes of His own nature, and which we carry about mysteriously enough in the pocket of a very tangible physical self. But we teach the children to expect material good, because we find it difficult to explain matters to the young human animal. And we find a sentimental stir within us because they take it for granted that we are not liars. But the first thing we know the small being rebels. It says first, "There is no Santa Claus!" and then a little later, "There is no God." We are not right. Nor are they. There is a Santa Claus, but he is not what we led them to believe. He has not for a chief characteristic a pot-belly, nor is he a jolly little man with one finger against a small red nose like a cranberry. But he is none the less real for being a great spirit of kindliness toward the helpless, whose home is in the warm heart of humanity instead of being located at the

North Pole. And there is a God. Not exactly the God of the creeds, perhaps. And no authentic likeness is to be found upon stained glass windows. But He lives and moves in great spiritual Law. And His name is Love. And through this He "takes care of little girls" quite literally "if they are good and mind Him."

These were Charlotte's simple thoughts.

She leaned from the window into the new morning, wrapped in Poole's bath-robe. And her face was more beautiful than Sophie's had ever been as she thought her little thoughts.

She herself had given a very material God to a child, and when, in the most terrible moment of that sweet child's life, it had prayed to have him "make Sophie go away," Sophie had stayed, in seeming contempt of that prayer. And then Drumsticks had said:

"There is no God."

Just as we have all said at times. Poole had always said so. And even the believing Charlotte had sometimes felt that perhaps it was all a mistake, since

she had found one weak man faithless. And no sooner do we say this in our insolence than we are *jerked* back into the spiritual nursery again. After that we are more modest, and become quite free to admit that, perhaps, after all, there may be reasons why we do not understand. And we add that if He some day will but make our puzzle clear, we will be content. But when he does, the grave robs us of a tongue.

And Drumsticks!

If Drumsticks were dying—and that evil thing was so, or Poole would have returned by midnight, Charlotte believed—Drumsticks was dying with a hard little heart rebelling against the God who had one morning given her a rose for which she cared nothing, but who, when she had asked to be delivered from the enemy, had not listened.

And then Charlotte wondered what would be done in heaven with such a naughty little angel as she was sure Drumsticks would make under the circumstances. But while she wondered her

narrowness fell away from her. Somehow or other she came to believe in a new God, and, with Him, a new heaven and a new earth. And she remembered that to see the child was to love her, and that she possessed the sort of nature which made even strangers

> "Soften, sleeken every word,
> As if speaking to a bird,"

and concluded that she could trust the child with the angels.

And for the child Charlotte believed that all would be well. Why should God care what a poor little child believed or did not believe—through the fault of other people! And Charlotte fell asleep in the sunlight, dreaming that all was exactly as she wished.

Which illustrates the chief use of dreams.

# PART II.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE SHIP REACHES THE STAR.

*A butterfly drifted in, and flew*
*For a moment about, and then out again;*
*'Into my life she came like you,*
*And went;' I faltered in pain."*

THE story is almost finished. It is not long, but neither was the short life with which it occupies itself. It was a simple life, eager to live on, but a hand turned the page. "Little ones to Him belong." So had run the nursery hymn at Seascrest. And we do not believe that the child whose gropings after Him were thwarted by mistakes failed to walk straight into the arms of the Strong One when the fluttering veil fell. It was a weak little soul, but it was His own. And what was—is.

But the homesickness for good, the blind striving after "the fun other little girls had," the grief which followed disappointment and loss of faith, were all we could see of the small and quickly passing

life. From an earthly point of view, it was a shipwreck—such a pitiful one, and of such a brave little craft. But let us shorten the story! Let the pen hasten quickly to the end! Of what Poole said to Sophie when called to Drumsticks' death-bed, or of what she had to say to him, I do not care to speak. Sophie—and even Poole—are but introduced in this small tale in such a way and manner as to explain the presence and position of Drumsticks—her narrow life—its sudden unfolding—its brief happiness—its despair—and its speedy ending.

When Poole came and stood by Drumsticks' bed, away up in that fourth story of Sophie's house, he saw the old gray blanket, and, at first glance, nothing else. Then, looking again, there were the two eyes of her—Drumsticks' eyes—regarding him with a gaze which was new to him, but which had remained as an attribute of theirs since the day she had been taken away from Seascrest. There was about it the hunted brilliance found in the eyes of a soft wild thing lured to destruction by

light of hunter—a something bewildered, mournful, and reproachful. Poole had seen a deer look so when hunting once in the Adirondacks. His hand had spared it, hesitating upon the trigger, and it had splashed swiftly out of the pool, away into the heart of the dim greenery of underbrush. One would have thought death might have been as merciful with Drumsticks.

Just what death should want with a little child, it is hard to understand. But that death wanted Drumsticks, and would have her, Poole did not much doubt from that hour.

Yet, immediately upon his arrival, and at his bidding, messengers were sent for men of whom it had been said that they could save a man if he had but one leg out of the grave. But they shook their heads with what seemed a concerted motion, and it took them a short time only to announce that in this case there was no hope.

But Drumsticks was not a man, and perhaps that made a difference. She did

not die that night. And she did not suffer. She was dying of a subtle blood poison, following one of those terrible, swift-working disorders which seem to select the brightest and most beautiful for their victims. She lay composedly all through a day as gray as her blanket, in which she was huddled to the last. Twice during the day she asked Poole, whose presence she seemed to take quite as a matter of course, to listen at her breast. There was an uneasy flutter there which seemed to trouble her. The bird was getting restless.

"Is it all right?" she asked him each time, uneasily.

"It's all—bully right!" And then he would kiss the child, and cuddle her, and soothe her into another hour's quiet. Along in the afternoon she turned, with a little natural gleam of mirth in her wide eyes, and said in quite a strong voice:

"Look, Play-papa! See! Do they shiver? See—" and then her voice weakened.

Knowing that she spoke of their former

friends, the trees in the little park opposite, which they had named, he turned to the window and was strong enough to humor her whim, encouraging her cheerful mood and telling her fanciful things of the elm, which she had named Mr. Morley, after Sophie's manager. Poole had seen neither man nor tree for months. But he went on weaving little sayings to interest her, of the privet "Fanny," the pine, the maple, and the lilac. The first was still green, the second graceful even while barren of leaves, and the lilac had budded out of season and been frozen for its pains, as New York lilacs often are. But the slight, swaying, silver birch tree was broken off close at the root, although he told her nothing of that. And it was all very wretched and dreary and wintry outside in the little park, but he told her nothing of that either.

Through the rest of the afternoon Drumsticks lay very still, thinking, with one hand at the bird in her breast.

Upon awakening, all she said during the

afternoon which in any way related to Seascrest was when she asked :

"Has baby's tooth comed yet ?"

And Poole remembered that the subject had been one of overwhelming interest to her as well as to Charlotte. As to Charlotte herself, her name was not spoken. And as Poole sat beside her, holding her hand, it struck him that the child seemed strangely old. Once, when he had been thoughtfully observing the woman crouched in the chair over by the table, he turned and met Drumsticks' eyes, and they seemed to be so very wise that his own fell. Big—so big and ironical ! Was it scorn which lay in their depths, along with wistfulness ?

She occasionally complained of feeling cold, and Poole helped her in her effort to draw the blanket closer about her.

Her eyes became a trifle dim, but followed him intelligently, seeming to question, but of what he could not determine. He was distinctly conscious of a wish that he was a better man. He had heard that very young children seem often vaguely

aware of their approaching dissolution, and he became uneasily certain that some strange cognizance of the situation seemed dawning upon the child. But Drumsticks said nothing, and Poole hung over her awkwardly, cursing himself for an irreligious, ignorant hound. Then again, aghast, he recalled the child's utterance as related by Charlotte.

"There is no God! Everything is lies!"

Was she dying thus, and would God—if indeed there were a God—punish the infidelity—the unbelief—of a little child—a little child who had so wished to believe in Him! It seemed to Poole that if there were a God, the child was safe. Alas! it was all exceedingly uncomfortable.

He was sitting upon the edge of her bed, facing her, and stroking her limp little hand. He had tried to find her pulse, but its rapidity and threadiness were not to be counted. As he sat with his eyes upon his little friend he saw once more the question dumbly written in her face.

"See here, Drumsticks," he ventured at

last, "you're tired; say your prayers and go to sleep. I'll sit here and take care of you!

*Who to?*" she asked with quivering lips. There was an indescribable bitterness in the words.

"Say, Drumsticks—tell a fellow what's the matter. Are you cross?"

"No, but Play-papa—do *you* think there's a God?"

"Why, er—er—there must be—don't you know!"

She looked at him curiously, studying his face.

"Don't you?" he added.

"No," said the child, mournfully.

Poole felt the perspiration standing upon his cold forehead. What a situation! Here he was, an unbeliever, the only companion, in a sense, of a little dying child. As a boy he had been taught that to die without faith was to be lost—was to be consigned to hell, in fact. Of late years he had doubted this, along with most other spiritual things which had been taught him when a child. He gave a gasp and made up his mind to lie.

"See here, Drumsticks—did I ever lie to you?" Thus are most tremendous fabrications often introduced.

"No," said the little girl, hesitatingly.

"Well—this is square! *There is a God,* and—er—a heaven." He wished that he himself could believe it. But to such as Poole, nothing is true—everything is true—all depending on the point of view.

The child listened intently.

"And He does—love little girls?"

"Why—by Jove—of course He does!"

"It doesn't seem—as if—it could—all just *happen*—" said the child, thoughtfully, and after a long pause.

Then she fell once more into a light slumber.

And so the day passed. As it grew dusk—at about the time when Drumsticks believed the white sail furled and the tiny ship anchored safe against the star—the life—the bit of a spark which belongs to Him—went out of her—and the thing came to pass which men call death. And the child lay so lightly in the lap of the Angel that Poole felt sure she had found

her best friend, for, at least, she was out of it all.

He withdrew his hand from hers just as Joy brought a light to the bedside. He told her what he thought had happened there, in the twilight, and Joy burst into tears and exclamations, going below to call Sophie, who had not been in the room at the time.

While she was gone, Poole leaned over the child and listened for the bird. He heard nothing; for its nest was now deserted. He kissed the peace of the white brow, and it seemed to him that he could hear Drumsticks ask, as so often before:

"Is it all right, Play-papa?"

"It's all right!" he answered, aloud, quite as before that day, adding to himself, "Would to God my heart were as quiet!"

But he did not really mean that.

Then he went away to wire Charlotte.

And as he walked over to the telegraph office, he wondered very much. And to an accompaniment of the feet, slipping, sliding, shuffling, gliding through the

slush of the melting first snow, his wonder shaped itself to *know,* even as he asked himself: "*Mais ou sont les neiges d'Antan?*" as Villon puts it, and it seemed for a brief moment as if he understood it all. But what he knew in that moment he lost, like the rest of us, in the next. It is as if the curtain lifts a bit as we kiss dead lips. Be that as it may, he found himself no wiser after than before, and reduced to guessing like the rest of us. The roofs of the great town were powdered with snow, and it seemed to Poole that all of the people they should have sheltered in that hour were in the streets. Through the crowds he stole along with that strange fixedness of gaze seen upon the faces of those who have recently looked upon Death.

He wired Charlotte this:

"*It is all over. Home to-morrow night.* JACK."

And she understood and read it with that sense of shock with which we receive that sort of news, even when we know it was all we had to expect.

"From Jack? What has he to say?" asked Mrs. Applegate. They were at the breakfast table, for the wire had been a night message.

"*All going well. Shall come home to-morrow night,*" read Charlotte, holding the oblong piece of paper before her, and speaking with duplicity of tone as well as of word. Really, it was extraordinary of Charlotte. And then she tore the thing into bits, and calmly tossed the only evidence against her into the fire. Mrs. Applegate was satisfied. She even overcame all of her suspicions finally, and after a bit was known to wonder "how Drumsticks was getting on," which she, perhaps, would have done even if she had come to know the truth, which she never did.

As for Poole, he remained in town but long enough to attend to certain details with patient earnestness. The following day he gathered the frail little body of Drumsticks into his arms and carried it downstairs, laying it within the small white bed he had himself purchased, and

which was to be her last. As his slow feet descended the long stairways cautiously his mind reverted to the first night he had met the child, and had carried her upstairs to bed. That was over three months ago.

A barefoot child, she had stood in a trailing night robe, clamoring for sweets, at the head of the staircase in a house where his feet carried him whenever he could set his soul aside. A child with strange graces of attraction, the child of a Columbine and a Pierrot. And she had smiled at him, and he, a man who had never before cared for children, cared for her from that hour—cared for her so well that now there was a lump in his throat which he was convinced would never allow itself to be swallowed. There had been a smell of flowers about that night, and he had caught her in his arms and ran up the three flights of stairs, carrying her away from it all, to her bed and her dreams. There were flowers to-day—a heavy odor—and he was carrying her down those same stairs to another bed, and to a sleep which

might or might not be dreamless. The man does not live who can tell us that. And with these thoughts expressed to himself a bit more brusquely, Poole laid the child very carefully out of his arms into the restfulness which it seemed had come to her. And the man was glad that his arms had been the last to hold her.

It seemed strange that Drumsticks should at last take things so quietly. She who,

> "Moving light, as all young things,
> As young birds, or early wheat
> When the wind blows over it,"

had always been so full of movement. And he knew that, living, no such rest could ever have come to one of her heart and brain, whom life had made the child of a Columbine and a Pierrot.

And so he left her, turning, however, at the door.

A virginal mystery of seven maiden summers, a little child lying lightly, as if tossed with carelessness into the lap of death; a smile in eclipse, a face half turned away, its cheek and lip half showing, with still a little color in them. But most of all, a whiteness—the rest a smile.

# PART II.

## CHAPTER V.

### SHOWING THAT THE LUCKY SINNER KNOWS A WOMAN.

*"The hand which hath held a violet doth not soon forego her perfume, nor the cup from which sweet wine hath flowed his fragrance."*

POET OF SHIRAZ.

IT seemed to Poole as if Death had set his ugly period after the sentence of his sin, and in his morbid mental condition the death of the child seemed to follow as a sequence, which it was not, of that sin. At any rate, it was all over now.

The blunder of it—the raging—the terror—and—yes, the charm of it! The will that is as the will of the wind! Alas for the fever—the fury—and the intoxication of the sad mad men who sink into the mire, only to turn, at the last, hopeless eyes pure woman-ward!

Well for a man then—oh, well for him!—if he can turn him to a Charlotte. A Charlotte whose gracious soul, abundant

in mercy, knows how to forget as well as to forgive, and whose pure, cool hand can heal the fever of his sin and give as a gift that forgetfulness which is already her own.

And Poole went at once to his Charlotte.

He arrived in the late afternoon. As soon as they were alone in their room, Poole answered the question in Charlotte's eyes by picking up a book of Mr. Bunner's delightful verse, which opened at a page that had so delighted Drumsticks where Charlotte had read:

> "There was an old, old, old, old lady,
> And a boy who was half-past three—"

He knew that the bird in her breast had always leaped to its musical quaintness, and he laid upon the words a little stiff prim lock of dark hair. Charlotte took the book from him and stood looking at it thoughtfully as he unpacked from his travelling bag an old gray blanket and flung it over the foot of the bed. He ran his hand softly over its surface, looking from his wife to it and then back again.

He thrust his hands into his pockets, finally, and stood with the shadow of the Puzzle on his face.

"So — she — Drumsticks — is *really* dead?" said Charlotte, slowly, tenderly regarding the little tress. When she closed the book a tear fell. "So—she is dead?"

"Yes. That's a devil of a word, Charlotte! That word—*dead!*"

He sat down and began to pull off his shoes, Charlotte hastening to fetch him his slippers. Later she poured him a small glass of brandy, which he tossed off, smiling to think that the scene was like certain old times. As he sat looking up at her, she sank upon her knees beside him, and, her brown head upon his breast, began to cry softly. It seemed strange to her that he should show so little feeling about the death of the child.

"Oh, Jack — what*ever* was she born for!"

"Who knows! But having been born —it—she was dead lucky—to die."

Before they went down to dinner the two stood for a moment at the frosted

window, looking out. He placed his arms about her, and she leaned pliantly against him. Suddenly she said:

"Look, Jack! Do you remember? There is Drumsticks' star—far out—over there!"

And their hearts stirred and melted into one again as they thought of that sweet child. The star was perhaps seen by thousands, but to them it was merely "Drumsticks' star." And ever would be.

And, gazing through the lens of a tear, Charlotte, blessed Charlotte, was enabled, by faith, to say:

"Good-night, dear Drumsticks!"

While Poole, in doubt, could only murmur:

"Good-bye, sweet child!"

So—good-night and good-bye.

*Lawrence, Long Island, November the twenty-eighth, eighteen hundred and ninety-four.*

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